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On Active Service Series

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WARD TALES

BY E. C. DAVIES

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TO MY COMMANDANT

LADY BURFORD-HANCOCK

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WARD TALES

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WARD TALES

IN THE WARD KITCHEN

THERE was a crash, a laugh, and then another crash—one of the delightful slow, piece-after-piece affairs which leave a doubt in listening ears as to whether anything whole can possibly be spared from the wreck.

Sister raised a worried head from the pile of case-sheets she was working on.

"Go and see what that is, nurse," she said to the V.A.D. standing by the table. "Jenkins again, I suppose. If it's anything much he shall reckon with Quarter Brown this time—I'm tired of making up his breakages."

Nothing loath, the V.A.D. hurried off to the scene of the damage. Judging from the sounds of hilarity which floated from the open door of the ward kitchen, the crockery breakers were celebrating the occasion. As she pushed the door wider, Jenkins, the

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supposed culprit, arrayed in his very best overall—a pukka coat-frock, not one of the overall-cum-nightshirt variety, made over by economical working parties to suppress the budding vanities of the R.A.M.C. staff—was ruefully regarding the debris on the ground at his feet.

By the sink, Mrs. Carter, the "charlady" of the block, had abandoned her dishes to stand, hands on hips, swaying feebly in hysterical mirth, while Jones and Tibbits, two of the patients who had presumably come in to lend a hand with the dinner things, were holding on to each other's shoulders as they rocked to and fro gasping for breath.

All around, on the floor, on the table, covering the dresser, fragments of broken mugs, knives and forks, tin plates—grisly relics of the just-past dinners—lent an additional air of chaos to the scene.

The V.A.D. stood on the threshold and surveyed the seeming lunatic asylum with a puzzled frown.

"What in the world are you all doing?" she inquired. "Sister wants to know what the damage is. Is there *one* person here who can give me an explanation?"

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Jenkins wiped his eyes on his coat-sleeve.

"It was like this, nurse," he said in a faint voice. "I was comin' in with the trays, an' Jones he'd left a bit of 'is puddin' on the floor. Tibbits, he says to me 'Look, Jenkins, there's a aeroplane,' and I silly like looks up, and blowed if 'e didn't let off a cracker; my foot it slips from under me an' down I goes." He looked across at this juncture and caught the sinful Tibbits's eye. Some interior thought appeared to strike them simultaneously and off they went again.

The V.A.D. stood by the door in high dudgeon.

"It doesn't appear to me to be anything in the *least* funny, Jenkins," she said witheringly.

Tibbits mopped his streaming eyes.

"'Tisn't what he *done*, nurse, it's what he said when he went down—lor' lumme."

And once again the four burst into shrill cackles. The V.A.D. turned on her heel.

"Well, I should advise you to get this disgusting mess cleared up before Sister comes along, or there'll be trouble. Don't say I didn't warn you." And she closed the door somewhat decisively.

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Jenkins, in his white coat-frock, minced across the kitchen in perfect imitation of the rather lofty young damsel who had just gone out.

"Don't say I didn't warn you, boys," he peacocked. "Sich a dirty place, I can't come inside again till it's all been stoved. Oh, you *dirty* people," surveying with intense scorn a little patch of sago pudding by the window.

"Orter 'ave bin Vester Tilley." Mrs. Carter's admiration of Jenkins's histrionic powers was enormous. "You orter tell nurse what you *was* doin' before you let them trays go; see what *she'd* say to a young feller like you makin' game of an old woman like me. Pictures, indeed!"

As a matter of fact, the aeroplane story was a distinct afterthought, the point at issue between Mrs. Carter and Jenkins really concerning a local Picture House and a visit supposed to have been paid there by the lady in question, in the company of the second orderly, and as stoutly denied by the principals concerned. Jenkins had a talent for picturesque embroidery of fact or fiction.

"Not but what I *likes* the Movies." Mrs. Carter turned to her dishes again. "But if

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you think at my time of life I'm goin' to run about with a whipper-snapper like Bates, you're wrong fer once, me lad. When I has an evenin' out I likes a *man* fer escort."

"Nasty one fer old Jenkins." Tibbits gave a wink in the direction of the white-robed one. "That's right, ma, don't you 'ave them bits o' boys puttin' on airs—'arf of 'em didn't never orter 'ave bin let out wivvout a collar an' chain." He dodged a neatly thrown tea-towel and limped round to the sink. "Jonesy, get a move on wiv the tins. We're goin' square-pushin' this afternoon—I don't want ter be round this kitchen all day. Nah then, ma, don't skimp the soda."

"Did you get plenty soda from the stores, Ginger?" Mrs. Carter hurled a pile of dinner tins into the hot water.

Jenkins was notoriously forgetful of such minor matters as stores, but on this occasion with superb scorn he pulled from the depth of the cupboard a square tin quite full of that precious commodity.

"An' where would you be if I didn't look after things—catch the young ladies in the stores givin' soda out promiscuous like—it falls to *me* to get the buckshees an' don't you

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forget it." He moved deftly round the narrow space, clearing the debris from the floor, scraping the plates into the generous pig buckets which stood beneath the sink. "An' if the colonel sees *that* he'll have a blue fit in the morning," alluding to slices of thick bread spread very thinly with margarine, which had evidently been unappreciated by the "fish diets."

"The waste in them kitchens is somethink terrible. Some of you orderlies can't be doin' your dooty prop'ly," Tibbits quoted largely, and another tea-cloth flew through space and landed on the dresser among the remnants of the sago pudding still left in the big tin. "*Now* look what you've gorn an' done, an' few enough tea-cloths as it is." His tone was aggrieved. "Jonesy, cut along an' ask nurse fer another dozen or two. Tell 'er it's fer glass polishin'—we can't rub up the fam'ly plate with wet rags like these," regarding with scorn the limp towels which did duty for many purposes in the absence of any of the nursing staff, who were apt to be ridiculously punctilious over such trivial matters.

Nurse, when appealed to by Jones, was disposed to be high-handed.

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"You boys are dreadful over the tea-cloths—only this morning I gave out six perfectly clean ones. What have you been doing—wiping the floors with them, I should imagine?"

Jones smiled his usual seraphic smile—he rather prided himself on being able to "manage" the nursing staff.

"Not but what we have used rather a lot," he said meekly, "but the fact is, nurse, I've been trying to make the crocks look a bit more decent. You orter see the washin' up they get sometimes. It's hard on the lads that have come from good homes—they *do* like their dinners served up a bit *like* a meal. Of course there's some that 'ud sit down to anything, and there's some that'll take their turn in the kitchen as if it was a day in clink. Now I never *was* one like that. Tibbits and me we're just about the same, we *like* lendin' a hand an' pottering about the kitchen—seems kinder homely. Only we likes to have our things nice and what I *always* say is 'Plenty of soda and clean cloths and you're off.' I'd like four if you can spare them, nurse."

Jones's one eye—the other obscured by a bandage—shone hopefully as nurse mounted

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the rickety steps and unlocked the linen cupboard. He made good use of the moment during which the stores of the ward lay open to view, to take a mental inventory of the same. There would be no fobbing off of inferior shirts or pyjamas on Jones in the future—the neat piles were too near the surface to escape observation.

But nothing of this was betrayed in his fervent thanks for present benefits received, and he stumped off to the kitchen with his clean tea-cloths as nurse locked the cupboard again rather ostentatiously.

His version of the affair as delivered to his confrères was naturally not quite the same as it would have been in the V.A.D.'s hearing.

"'Ad a bit of a struggle," he said laconically, as he handed the checked cloths to the impatient Tibbits. "Fussy Lizzie sits on them stores as if she was 'atchin' them. Pity we 'aven't Nurse Dringhouse back again—we could do with 'er. Lizzie gets on my nerves with 'er 'You boys'—might be a lot o' school kids."

"She's young." Tibbits's tone was tolerant.

"Likes to keep on Sister's right side a bit, don't she?" Mrs. Carter had finished the

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tins and was now giving the plates a casual rinse in a sinkful of rather greasy water. "I heard her soapin' up rarely the other morning —over the floors it was. I could ha' told Sister a bit o' what nurse reely thought about the polishin' if I'd liked; but I never was one ter make mischief an' Sister takes a bit o' notice of what I says. I 'aven't worked on this block for more'n two years without 'avin' a few words with 'er ladyship now'n then, but takin' 'er all round she's a good old girl, an' thinks a lot of 'er block."

The "charlady's" tone was reminiscent. She had seen many sisters come and go during the four years she had scrubbed corridors and cleaned grates in the big hospital, and there are more things seen from the vantage point of the ward kitchen than the casual observer might imagine.

"'Tisn't what it was like in '15," she continued in a rather melancholy voice. "We had used ter see a bit o' life on the wards then. We'd a resident medical staff—proper gentlemen they was some of 'em—an' they *did* brighten things up a bit. Don't seem ter me like the same place now with these lady doctors as 'ouse surgeons an' a lot of 'arf an'

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'arfers, doin' the rounds. Civvies I call them, if they 'ave got a Sam Browne acrost their backs."

"Can't be 'elped, ma." Jenkins picked up the trays of clean tins and prepared to load up the trolly with them *en route* for the big cook-house. "They want the others in the front line. Don't forget we're only an afterthought—dug-outs is plenty good enough for the Umpteenth General."

"That's why you're here, Jenks—unless it is you're the only one of your kind an' they're afraid Barnum's 'll be a bit short after the war. Nay, Ginger, nay, my bonny lad, don't 'ee now."

Tibbits took shelter behind Mrs. Carter's ample form, but she declined to give him sanctuary and there was a short but invigorating scuffle from which the two combatants emerged with a great air of refreshment. Jones stolidly finished the forks and spoons and put the kettle on the gas stove.

"Might as well have a drop of ma's tea before we go out," he said reflectively. "I've an idea we might be late back, Tibbits."

"Where we goin' this afternoon, Jones? We ain't seen round that new munition

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fact'ry yet—they say there's a few sports down there "—Tibbits cocked a wise eye.

But Jones shook his head and lit a Woodbine.

"Nothing doing," he said tersely. "I've got enough trouble on 'and already with that other lot. We won't be goin' to Con. Camp yet a while, you an' me. I'm takin' no more on till the major marks me out."

"Well, what's the game? There's buckshee pictures at Olympia—Toosday, isn't it?—an' a free tea at the Y.M." Tibbits lacked imagination but fell in readily with suggestions.

Jones smiled the aloof smile of one who scorns such vulgar pleasures.

"What d'ye say to a invite—motor ter Bingport, tea at a slap-up place, band an' all to follow?"

"What you gettin' at?" Tibbits looked incredulous, but the production of a scented note, rather thumbed and grimy after its sojourn in Jones's greatcoat pocket, backed the astounding "invite" rather conclusively. Tibbits fingered it a little dubiously. "S'pose it's all right?" he ventured.

"You bet your life—they're visitors here.

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Thank your lucky you've a pal as has a *way* about him. You orter hear me tell the tale." Jones's smile was more seraphic than ever as he warmed the tea-pot in a professional manner. "Now then, ma, line up for a cup of tea. Where's those little cups I see the other day?"

Mrs. Carter, with an agility hardly to have been expected from so massive a frame, climbed neatly on the one Windsor chair, and handed down two pink cups—the property of the night nurses on the block, and fondly imagined by them to be safe from disturbance on a high bracket above the door.

Jones folded up the packet of tea very carefully, replaced it in the "charlady's" special drawer in the dresser, and doled out the sugar with due respect for its rarity. Tibbits found a battered china cup and handed it up to be filled.

"Can't fancy a cup of good tea out of them mugs," he said with a fastidious air. "Breakfast an' tea-time's well enough—the mugs just about match the stuff they put in 'em—but when I get a cup of something that you can *call* tea, it's gotter be china for this child."

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"Any left for me?" Jenkins, smoothing his ginger locks with a weary hand, appeared languidly in the doorway.

"Hello, Ginger, what's the trouble now? Never did see such a chap for worrying. Spit it out, lad—tell ma what's wrong." Tibbits put his cup down on the dresser and lit another cigarette.

"Another nice little job they've unloaded on me." Jenkins accepted one of the pink cups and stirred his tea with a fork. "Sendin' another batch of fresh chaps down here to lick into shape before they send 'em on draft —my luck again."

"What, rookies?"

"Worse than that—overseas men that aren't fit for infantry again, 'wound stripers' they're shovin' into the R.A.M.C. *They* won't take tellin'."

Jenkins's outlook was pessimistic. As the possessor of two red stripes on his sleeve and his first-class nursing certificates, the pleasant task of shepherding new arrivals on the staff into ward ways was often his, much to his disgust.

"An' when you've done it there isn't a scrap o' difference made in this rotten show

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between a chap that knows his work an' a general duty man. I'm about sick of it."

Jones smiled reminiscently.

"You orter have bin in the ward on Monday, Jenkins," he chuckled. "I thought Sister'd 'a died laffin'. You know that new chap, Simmins?"

Jenkins assented rather savagely—Simmins was one of the minor trials of his life.

"Calls himself an orderly an' can't even draw the stores without losin' half the rations," he interpolated with scorn.

"'Twasn't stores. 'E'd been showin' off a bit, 'What they did in the 53rd' an' all that sort o' bunkum, *and* 'e was makin' game of some of the staff there—bit low down I called it. 'Why,' 'e says, pickin' up one of the big receivers as Roberts had just been sick in, for ter carry it away, 'there was some chaps that ignorant as they didn't know what a *retriever* was.' Laff! I thought the chaps 'ad 'a' died. Roberts 'e laffed as 'ard as any of 'em, and they christened 'im Fido on the spot. Best of it was he didn't tumble to it for a day or two, but you've only gotter bark a bit or set up an 'owl now, an' he's out o'

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that ward like a shot—don't like ter show 'is face in no more than 'e can 'elp."

"And if you don't get a move on it'll be something worse than a retriever I'll be callin' you, you great chetterer." Tibbits elbowed Jones along the kitchen. "Good-bye, ma, see you again in the mornin'. Late passes ter-night—not 'arf." And with a wink at Jenkins, Tibbits limped off.

Presently the pair, greatcoated and capped to the last degree, reappeared at the head of the stone stairs opposite the kitchen door, and waved good-bye.

Mrs. Carter picked up her brush again and prepared to deal valiantly with the tables and floor.

"That's a couple o' nice lads," she remarked. "Keeps yer goin' a bit ter hear them talk. I always was one fer a bit o' life. Seems as if a lot of these new lads got the spirit knocked out of 'em—they're all so bloomin' polite, 'Excuse me' and 'So sorry to trouble you' like a lot of girls."

"That's what we are like to-day—you're a bit behind the times, ma." Jenkins picked up a tray and prepared to make his peace with Sister over breakages, since he was

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obliged to fetch the bread for tea from her office. "Proper drawin'-room ways we've got, 'specially when we're Boche-huntin', I don't think."

Mrs. Carter bent to her work, and Jenkins, after fetching the bread, made a hasty tour of the wards and came into conflict with the V.A.D. on duty, with whom he had a standing feud.

"Do some of them girls good to get out overseas," he muttered as he returned. "Wish we had our old batch back; a feller could could get on with them, but Fussy Lizzie puts years on me."

"What you grizzlin' about now?"

Mrs. Carter wiped her hands and began to slice the long loaves. Jenkins subsided into a chair and sharpened a knife.

"Well, it's Lizzie; she an' me never could agree. I worked with her before on C Block an' she nearly drove me silly there. It's 'Orderly, why haven't you done this?' an' 'Orderly, what d'ye mean by that?' till I don't know if I'm standin' on my head or my heels."

With the rapidity of long practice he smeared the margarine on the slices of bread

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heaped before him, and with equal dexterity scraped it off again.

"Gotter go gentle with the Maggy Ann to-day," he warned Mrs. Carter, who was plastering it on with a liberal hand. "They're cuttin' the rations down again; seems it's goin' to be like the old man that tried to teach his donkey to live on a straw a day an' when he'd just taught it nicely the beggar kicked the bucket. That's what I'm doin'—fadin' away. You'll plant a few daisies, ma?"

"I'll wait till you're there afore I lay out my money. Hangin' 'ull be your end, I'm thinkin', if you go on the way you've started," was the only sympathy he could extract.

There was silence for a few minutes as the two worked on, then a shrill voice was upraised: "Orderly! Orderly!" finally "ORDERLY!"

"That's Lizzie." Jenkins's tone was resigned. "Let her shout a bit more—it'll do her throat no harm to get a bit of exercise. Sweet voice she has."

"Go on with you! It's too bad lettin' the pore girl shout like that—maybe there's one of the lads wantin' you."

"She can come an' fetch me. 'Tisn't ten

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minutes since I was in the wards. There's very few in bed now, most of the boys are out to-day."

Jenkins looked mulish. Ordinarily a good-tempered willing orderly, whom most of the nurses liked and worked amicably with, his back was up to-day, well up, and from the expression on his face it would take a good deal of putting down.

The sound of footsteps was heard and in a moment a very irate little person bounced into the kitchen.

"Jenkins, you ought to be absolutely *ashamed* of yourself—I shall report you to Sister if this sort of thing goes on much longer. I've been shouting and shouting at the top of my voice for at least ten minutes. Here's nearly four o'clock and not a drop of milk fetched, no eggs for tea and no lemons for Parsons's lemonade. I'm as busy as I can be and you sit here in the kitchen calmly cutting bread and butter."

Out of breath Nurse Potter stopped for a moment. Jenkins did not move.

"I've been down three times to the stores for that milk, nurse," he said sulkily. "'Tisn't my fault if the stuff hasn't come, lemons they

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haven't *got* to-day and I told Sister that this morning. Eggs won't be in till four o'clock, an' what's the use of my trailin' up and down those stairs for waste journeys ? "

" You're a lazy, useless boy and I'm sick of having anything to do with you." Nurse Potter gave a toss of her handkerchiefed head, which set the tails of her cap flapping. " Anyhow you'd better go down again and do *something*—go and worry the stores till they give you what you want. We ought to have an orderly with a bit of push about him. And if I have any impertinence it will be Sister who'll have to deal with you, not I." With a parting flourish the V.A.D. turned on her heel and went into the ward again.

Jenkins muttered a few very uncomplimentary remarks under his breath, then he got up slowly.

" You see the sort of thing. First nurse I've ever had to do with that 'ud speak to me like that. Little mischief-maker she is ; telltale too. She'd like nothing better than get me turned off the flat, and me with never a complaint against me since the day I joined ; an' that's seven years come August."

" Sister wouldn't listen to tales." Mrs.

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Carter endeavoured to pour oil on troubled waters. "Anyway, if she did you've got a tongue in your head; you can stick up for yourself."

"She wouldn't believe a word I said if one of her nurses put in a complaint. It 'ud be to the colonel I'd go an' pretty quick, an' you know what *he* is."

With a very aggrieved air Jenkins went slowly down the steps and along the block which led to the stores. And from his point of view it was rather unlucky that just as he arrived at the door a fresh consignment of eggs was being unpacked, a frail of lemons had been carried in, and the milk floats stood waiting in the yard to take empty cans back to the station.

"Fussy Lizzie *will* say 'I told you so' when I get back," he said to himself. "Like as not, she'll say it was a make-up tale that I couldn't get the stuff before."

And his worst predictions were verified when he got back to the kitchen after his second journey with full loads.

But an hour later a kindly Fate remembered Jenkins.

Tea-time arrived and the wards were full

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of hungry mortals who besieged the kitchen with eggs to be boiled, poached, fried, or scrambled as the fancy of their owners dictated, barged in and out with mugs and tea cans, and clamoured continually for more plates of bread and butter. Jenkins and the junior V.A.D. strove manfully amidst the throng, Nurse Potter having left for her own tea and Mrs. Carter's hours of service expiring at four o'clock.

Flushed but triumphant, Jenkins served the last applicant for cooked eggs, and the V.A.D. toiled up to the kitchen for the final trayful of cups for the milk diets. Then they smiled across the kitchen at each other in friendly fashion.

"We got through nice and early before Nurse Potter came back from tea." The new little V.A.D. beamed happily; this was her first week in hospital.

Jenkins assented heartily.

"You're shaping rarely, nurse. You an' Nurse Potter on to-night?"

"Yes, it's Sister Feversham's half-day, but we shan't be busy. Aren't you having off duty?"

Jenkins shook his head.

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"Not to-day, nurse—my relief's gone on escort with that loony fellow, but I'll likely get the day on Friday."

The little blue and white figure departed briskly for the wards, and began bed-making; while Jenkins collected the tea-things and began to wash up.

Presently, however, there was a call and he went into the small ward to see what was wanted.

"I can't find nurse," the R.A.M.C. corporal who had just come up with a new case informed him. Sister's seen this man, an' the M.O.'s coming up directly. Escort'll have to stay the night. Can you give him a bed somewhere? He can't get back. An' you might let me have his particulars by and by —I'm in a hurry."

The corporal departed, and Jenkins picked up the ward kit book and began to make out an entry for the new man to sign. The escort sat on one chair; the patient on another, nursing his kit-bag.

Both looked tired, and the escort had a grimy bandage on his hand.

"Name o' Black. 43772. 4th K.L.R.

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C. of E. 39. $2\frac{4}{12}$. The laconic answers followed the quick flow of inquiry.

Jenkins was in the act of filling up the bed board when Nurse Potter returned from tea, but he promptly put it down as the V.A.D. hurried up the ward, importance in every line of her figure.

"Jenkins fussing round as usual," she said under her breath. "Always trying to do other people's work." And scarcely giving the man time to open his mouth she dashed at the astonished escort with a thermometer, and rapidly shaking it down stuck it in his mouth.

Jenkins moved forward a step, then with an inward smile moved back again. It was not his affair after all. The patient sat apathetically on his chair quite unnoticed, shivering a little, but otherwise betraying no sign of animation. Presumably he regarded Nurse's strange conduct as part and parcel of hospital routine.

With a professional jerk of her wrist the V.A.D. examined the second hand of her wrist-watch and as solemnly counted the escort's pulse and respiration, keeping the thermometer a full minute longer in his mouth

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by reason of his obvious eagerness to begin conversation.

As she took it out and examined it, Jenkins's left eye drooped solemnly, twice, in the direction of his left cheek. The escort grasped the situation and swallowed the remarks he was about to make.

"Name o' Juggins. Lance corp'ril. 5th Wessex. 22. 3 years in service. 30976," he answered meekly.

The V.A.D., pulling out her fountain-pen, desired to enter his particulars on a bed board. She detached one from an opposite bed—Jenkins had dropped the other unobtrusively on the ward table.

"You'd better come along and the orderly will give you a bath. This will be your bed, number fourteen." The V.A.D.'s tone was magisterial.

"Well, I wouldn't say no to a barf," Lance-Corporal Juggins replied in rather a puzzled manner. "The corp'ril as brought us up, me an' my friend here, 'e said you'd be able to give me a bed for the night as I've missed the last train back—or shall 'ave when I've seen my friend in bed fust, but I didn't bargain for extries."

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The V.A.D. frowned impatiently.

"You've got no temperature, a bath will do you good. Go along with the orderly and he'll draw your kit. Then I'll dress your hand. Nothing else the matter with you?"

Still Juggins lingered.

"An' what about Black?" he inquired.

"Who's Black—that man sitting over there? Has he come with you?"

"Well, I came with 'im in a manner of speaking. You see, it's 'im that's ill, not me—came over all shiverin'-like on p'rade this morning an' 'e's been like that all day."

. . . . .

The loquacious explanations continued. Jenkins, hurriedly picking up the kit-bag of the genuine case, sped from the ward to hide his mirth. His cup was indeed full, nigh to running over.

History does not record Nurse Potter's observations.

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"EYE-WASH"

THE M.O. had finished his round, and being in an amiable and communicative mood that morning stood talking to Sister by the ward door. Binks, whose bed was nearest, and whose ears were proverbially long, caught without much difficulty the drift of the quick phrases.

"You've heard the A.D.M.S. is giving us a call this week, sister? Hot stuff this new man, too, as far as I can gather—one of the old school, you know. I heard he gave them a pretty stiff time of it last week over at Headquarters; Colonel Watson told me he wanted to see everything, had every one of their dressings down, and poked his nose into the pig buckets—that sort, you know."

Sister looked alarmed.

"Have you any idea when he's coming, major?"

"Well, these visits are supposed to be

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surprise affairs; but they generally give us some sort of a warning. They say Thursday, but I'll get to know definitely as soon as I can and let you know. Good morning, sister."

Sister sighed heavily as the major left the ward.

"Did you hear that?" she said in tragic tones to the staff nurse standing near. "The major says there's going to be *another* inspection! If I'm not absolutely sick and tired of them all! How these people ever imagine we can do any work with them brass-hatting around I can't think." She sighed again. "You'd better get the girls to work to-day, sister," she continued. "Have that linen-room done out and the bathroom, and I'll see if I can't get a little polish for the floor. They say he's *frightfully* particular over the dressings, so you'll have to be quite certain everything is all right."

Sister Denton, the plump little staff nurse, looked comfortably unmoved by Sister's agitation.

"Well, so long as we don't get a big convoy in to-morrow or Thursday—you did say Thursday, didn't you, sister?—we shall be

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quite straight, I think. Nurse must try and get the bed linen changed to-morrow."

"We *ought* to have the walls washed down." Sister's eyes wandered uneasily round the ward. "I doubt if there's really time, but they *do* look dirty. You'd better keep some of the men in to help. And just look at these tables." She turned to the door with another heavy sigh, but stopped again. "Boys," she said to the ward in general, which was sitting with one ear cocked so to speak, "there's an inspection on Thursday—I shall want you all to help sister to make your ward a credit. Mind every man's kit is complete, and you must *all* have your red ties on. Nurse"—turning to one of the V.A.D.'s—"run down to the sewing-room and ask them to give you the Turk's-head; I don't want any cobwebs on the ceiling. And, Sister Denton, come along and have your lunch; Nurse Williams can go on with the work till you come back."

The caped and striped Deity in charge of the block vanished into the outer corridor, and her satellite, caped but not striped, followed her.

As the door closed behind them, the ward

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upraised its voice. The two V.A.D.'s looked at each other dismally—they knew by long and bitter experience what their lot would be for the next two days.

"When I heard her say 'Turk's-head' I knew what we were in for," the junior pro. said gloomily.

"The ward will be upside-down and the men will get into vile tempers, and *then* I expect the old thing will never turn up at all. Remember the time when General Fitzsymons was coming—and they told us he'd be here by 7 a.m? *I* never believed it—catch a Brass Hat out of his bed at five o'clock to motor down to this old show—and I was right. The night people had the men all out of bed and washed by three o'clock; and, of *course,* the blighter never turned up at all. How they cursed!"

Nurse Williams laughed.

"It's funny afterwards, but not so amusin' at the time, Teddy. *And* we have about four able-bodied men on the whole floor—you can't ask cripples to polish the ward—we shall have the slogging to do as usual. Lord, I wish I were a sister! Put your leg up higher, Bates, I can't get at that bandage."

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Bates obliged, and Nurse Edwards, who not being yet entrusted with any but minor dressings naturally took a deep interest in all these operations, lingered to watch progress.

The other girl looked up after a few minutes.

"I don't want to hurry you, Edwards, but you'd better fetch that implement of torture. As long as Sister sees you with it in your hand she'll be happy. When I'm through my work I'll come and lend a hand."

"Put a bit more wool round my foot, nurse—it gets cold like," Bates said ingratiatingly. He liked his nurses to be lavish with the Government cotton-wool.

"You are an old fuss, Bates," said Nurse Williams; but she put the cotton-wool in nevertheless. "I suppose I'll have the pleasure of repadding your back splint in honour of this old inspection—it looks a bit grubby for his High Mightiness to see."

Binks's voice was upraised from the end of the ward.

"Yes," he said mincingly, "let us have *no* h'irregularities. Kit inspection as well on Thursday, Bates," warming to his subject. "The major was putting the wind up Sister rarely—told 'er the old man 'ud take 'er

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stripes off 'er if 'e caught one of the lads without 'is red tie. Said she'd 'ave to be certain to cut Davies's 'air for 'im, told 'er the general liked the 'eads shaved *best*, but if there wasn't time for that she was just to run the clippers round the lot. Proper regimental 'e is."

"My hair's all right." Davies smoothed his macassared brow tenderly. "Jealous you are—you would be, having a crop like a jail-bird."

"Suppose that means we're all kep' in for another two days for nothin'." Gunner Hopkins's voice was decidedly testy. He was getting along quite well, thank you, with a window cleaner in the town who occasionally dallied with the hospital panes, and he deeply resented any interference with his "square-pushing" hours. "Might as well be in quad as in *this* show," he grumbled as he struggled into his greatcoat. "Last time I stopped it, they sent me to a private 'ospital. V.A.D. place it was, gentleman's 'ouse—proper toffs they were, I can tell you. We could ha' stopped out until ten every night of our lives if we'd liked. This place puts years on me. My tie straight, Moxon?"

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Gunner Hopkins was the acknowledged dandy of the ward and his toilet was a lengthy affair, usually leading to recriminations of an extremely personal character on account of his lengthy appropriation of the one bath-room mirror.

"Oh, you're all right; pity you 'aven't got a better face to put under that badge. It's a good badge that—if there is some better."

"For goodness' sake, Moxon, don't start that old argument again." Nurse Williams was deftly wheeling the trolly up the ward. "When you start fighting over which is the best regiment, I want to shake the lot of you. Come here, Clark, let me put that sling right. You can't go out looking like that. Parsons, have you got your stick?" turning, as she gave a tweak to the refractory sling, to inspect her flock as they started for their morning promenade. "Be careful—the leaves are falling and some of the streets are very slippery. Don't forget my *Tatler*, Brooks."

There was a chorus of "Good morning, nurse," as the procession started and the ward

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was comparatively quiet for a minute or two after their departure.

The bed patients, however, had fewer claims on their time, and prepared themselves to do ample justice to the latest bit of gossip. The ward is a narrow world, and those who have been denizens of it for weeks and even months naturally welcome any variation from the monotony of its daily routine. An inspection formed a fine field for speculation and the alleged proclivities of the A.D.M.S. occupied a happy half-hour for the bed patients.

"'Ere's our little nurse wiv the fevver duster," said Coyne, an irrepressible Cockney, as Edwards propelled herself and her unwieldy armful through the ward door. "Nah then, boys, where's the ladder? Show a leg, you there"—hurling a neatly rolled *Daily Mirror* across the room at one recumbent form—"an' 'elp Nurse a bit."

"Dry up, Coyne." Matthews turned over on his side. "Let a feller have his sleep out. 'Tisn't much peace we'll get this week; not after to-day leastways."

"You won't get any after this minute," Nurse Edwards said grimly, as she pulled

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his bed out with a vigorous jerk that brought him nearly into the middle of the ward, and tied a crumpled apron over her clean one.

"Now the fun's beginning," Matthews groaned as his small nurse mounted a very creaky pair of steps with an outwardly stout demeanour and an inwardly quaking heart, and began to twirl the Turk's-head madly along the walls. "Look out for your head, Bates! She'll be comin' a cropper off those steps in a minute, or I'm a Dutchman."

"For goodness' sake be quiet, Matthews!" Nurse Edwards's voice quavered. She hated heights. "If you say things like that I shall be *down*."

Her senior hurried to the rescue.

"I'll hold the steps for you. It's all very well to gibe, Matthews, but it's got to be done. I'll take a turn directly, Teddy."

Together they made a grand tour of the walls, the beds huddled sociably together in the middle of the ward, so that former acquaintances became friends over exchanges of Woodbines and matches. The promenaders, returning, cast horrified glances at the state of their temporary domicile.

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"Well, Ah dean't know." Howgate, the big Yorkshireman, stopped and gazed reflectively at the two V.A.D.'s now washing walls for dear life. "Minds me o' Saturday neets wi' ma missus—she were a rare 'un fer fettlin' up. Ah'll gee thee a hand; 'twean't be't fust time as Ah've done a bit o' wall weshin'. Mind oot o't road, lad," as Parsons, his five-foot-nothing chum, banged into him, his eyes wandering in search of his locker which appeared to have strayed from its wonted habitation. And Howgate, stripping off his coat, warmed to the fray.

Nurse Edwards thankfully relinquished her post at the top of the ladder and Howgate under a running fire of chaff—which he regarded much as a mastiff might the yelps of a small Pekingese—scrubbed and rubbed with truly professional zeal, emitting sounds like those of an energetic stable-boy grooming horses meanwhile.

"Go steady, Howgate," laughed Nurse Williams. "Don't scrub your bit too clean. It shows up the rest too conspicuously; and we haven't time for more than a lick and a promise."

"Ah'm bahn ter show these lads here what

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Yorkshire can do when a Tyke gets his teeth in," was Howgate's rejoinder.

And only the advent of dinners and the hurried scamper of the ladder holder saved the wall from his too vigorous hands.

Down in the Sisters' Quarters, over minced mutton and potatoes slowly congealing on the table, as the impatient throng waited for a dilatory home sister to pronounce anticipatory thanks, the babel of voices ran high. The staff had come down from the hospital in various moods, but Williams, whispering to Nurse Medenway, her meal-time neighbour and all-time chum, voiced the general opinion when she consigned all Brass Hats to limbo—to put the matter politely.

"Had a rotten morning?" Medenway's voice was sympathetic, but her expression remained as usual one of mild amusement not unmixed with scorn.

"Oh, so-so," Williams answered. "Our sister doesn't get the wind up as badly as some, you know, but whatever this man *is* or isn't he seems to have put the fear of God into the M.O.'s. They're like a lot of frightened hens with a fox at the door."

Medenway's smile widened a little.

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"You ought to have been down with me," she said with a reminiscent chuckle. "I had to go round to the M.O.'s room with a theatre report and I caught them all nicely —cooking up the orderly officers' list so it would read all right. Does seem a bit queer, you know, that Captain Oxford puts in an appearance as O.M.O. about once in three months, and Mr. Tyson absolutely *living* on the premises. They scattered like fun when they heard me knock."

Nurse Williams peered into the cabbage dish.

"I always search it for foreign bodies," she said apologetically. "Last week I had two creatures in mine—it put me off my feed for days. Yes; some of them *do* want shaking up a bit. What *I'd* like now is for this old chap to come round unexpected like and see life as it really is. *I'd* tell him a few home truths if he grumbled to me about the grubby counterpanes; and I'd show up the stores. When it comes to buying your own Ronuk because you can't wring an ounce out of the quartermaster—they make me tired."

Medenway smiled more sweetly still.

"Oh, but this place is a little Paradise

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compared to some," she said. "After all, the men do get their food all right and the wards are warm. They only grizzle here on principle; they know well enough really that the place is *bon*. Now last year I was stuck at a camp hospital for six months. My dear child, I could make your *hair* stand on end if I told you all about that place! What do you think of being unable to get a bit of coal for the wards because the quarter had had a row with the only coalman we dealt with. No coal in the wards on Christmas Day—we nearly had a riot! *And* the food; perfectly disgusting, good rations ruined in the cook-house. Then men used to put in complaints nearly every day and some of the O.M.O.'s were furious about it and went to the colonel and did *their* little bit. But do you think he cared? Not an atom. However, *I* put a spoke in. I suppose I'd have been slain if Matron had caught me posing as Interfering Jane; but I wasn't born yesterday. Pass the salt, Williams."

"Do hurry up, Med! The duff's coming round; but I want to hear what you did alle samee."

Medenway disposed rapidly of the rest of

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her first course and pushed her plate away. "I don't eat nowadays," she said. "I just stoke. The body needs nourishment, but my artistic palate desires *no* sustenance from the efforts of our so-called cook. Oh, about the men's food, you mean. I just sailed over their heads and talked to a dear old brigade major who was a patient of mine in the officers' ward. I can tell you I rubbed it in with a firm hand. He hadn't the least idea; kept on saying 'God bless my soul' like a parrot, *but* he went to the colonel *and* raised Cain. Threatened to report things to G.H.Q. and what not. Within a month the place was a different show. And nobody knew that I was the God in the car, so it was *quite* all right."

Home Sister collected eyes and the table rose to return thanks. The procession tailed upstairs and split and cohered again into little groups and there was much tea brewing. Williams was dragged forcibly into her cubicle and given ten minutes in which to change.

"For I am weary beyond belief of shop and talkers of shop," said Medenway with some force. "And you're coming out with me for a tram ride and a large tea at the

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nearest tea-shop. Judging by the reports I've heard, the A.D.M.S. has an equal passion for neatly filled charts and clean counterpanes; he flies into a rage if there isn't enough carbolic in the sputum cups and if one has an ounce too much cotton-wool on the dressings. He likes the boots in neat order at the foot of the men's beds and tears his hair if a locker is out of line with the rest. One M.O. swears he revels in pig buckets, another vows he won't enter a ward unless the pro.'s are penned in the linen-room out of sight. I've heard that he court-martialled a sister for having a hole in her stocking and there *is* a story that he can't abide V.A.D.'s He tolerates the St. John girls, but it's the Red Cross on our apron—like bulls, you know. And I feel if I hear *one* more 'Well, I had it on good authority' story I shall just sit down and scream."

Williams looked alarmed.

"Don't do that—you've got such a strong voice. I'll come along in a jiffy."

It was easy in the sunlight of a cheerful October day, all blue and gold, with russet leaves and fat white clouds, to forget the existence of such things as ward troubles,

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but less so when the next morning brought an atmosphere of hurry and bustle unparalleled even in the memory of the most inspection-hardened V.A.D.'s.

"If we had many more days of this we should be dead," said Nurse Edwards dismally as she strewed spoonfuls of Ronuk on the floor, the resultant slimy little island being mopped up by an old brush, its head tied up in a rag. Her endeavours to stir the apathy of the few able-bodied men in the ward into a white heat of enthusiasm for the necessary polishing subsequent on these preparations left her rather weary. "Come on, Thomas; they've been polishing their floor like mad the other end of the block and surely we're not going to be let down by them."

As a rider spurs his weary horse at the end of a long day, so with sarcasm blended judiciously with soothing syrup did Edwards encourage her workers, till their pride if not their interest was aroused, and the ward floor began to wear the hyper-slippery complexion dear to the official heart, and equally disliked by the crutch-carrying community which walks thereon.

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The daily work was sandwiched in with difficulty between these vital matters incidental to *Der Tag*, as the ward irreverently christened the coming morrow, and tempers wore thin among the junior staff as their official superiors urged them to yet further efforts. The bed patients meanwhile piled fuel on the fire by caustic references to "Eye-Wash," their outlook considerably jaundiced by enforced abstention from many of their ordinary amusements.

"Well, at all events to-day will see the end of it," Nurse Williams said wearily as she came on duty next morning. "Look here, Edwards, you'd better get the men out of that bathroom in good time. Parkins will go on shaving till the cows come home if you don't stop him, and I warn you Sister's temper isn't of the sweetest this morning."

"That's what comes of being the crack ward of the hospital." Edwards suppressed a giggle as the worried staff nurse bore down on her with anguished references as to bed patients' counterpanes. "Oh, yes, sister, that'll be all right," she said soothingly. "They've promised us ten this morning—

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only you see it isn't any use going up till the linen stores open. *We'll* see to it."

"Well, you'd better make haste and get the ward finished. Sister says every single dressing is to be done as usual and they say he's coming at 10 o'clock. How we'll ever get through I *can't* imagine."

Nurse Williams sniffed semi-audibly.

"If you didn't fuss so much, my dear," she said savagely to herself in the seclusion of the preternaturally tidy linen room, "we should get on a bit faster. Now then, Williams, tuck your sleeves up and start in."

A strenuous half-hour ensued, until the ward was finished. The floor shone like glass, the tables were like mirrors, reflecting the plants and flowers in their glassy depths. A fevered junior pro. shadowed by an anxious satellite hovered uneasily, brass polish in hand, between bathroom tap and ward door knobs, electric switches and window handles.

Every bed was in line, every locker denuded of its superfluous contents, and the bed patients, by reason of the adoption of these said treasures, spent uneasy moments avoiding lumpy parcels, their efforts rendered more difficult by the fierce accuracy with

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which every recumbent form was tucked in. Indeed the cot cases presented the appearance of fowls ready trussed for the oven, movement being impossible, and breath possible but not probable. Sheets and blankets were folded with careful precision well below the possibility of warmth to the occupants of the beds, and " corners "—that special touch in hospital bed-making which differentiates ward from ward—received fevered attention from the nurses, under a heavy fire of comment. A neat row of boots adorned the bottom rail of the beds, and the kits lay immaculately folded on the top of the lockers. Only the trolly, bumping methodically round the ward, seemed reminiscent of happier careless days in the midst of all this painful perfection.

The dressing buckets bulged with cotton-wool and splint paddings—Sister Denton was growing reckless, a fact commented on with some freedom by her watchful flock. It was notorious in the ward that she was averse to waste. Indeed, her carefulness in the matter of clean bandages and supplies of cotton-wool had in the past led to mild recriminations, but to-day, even Nurse Williams, whose

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tendencies were to the lavish distribution of hospital supplies, stood aghast at the pile which grew as they worked from bed to bed.

"If he's going to take down *our* dressings," Sister Denton said grimly, "I'll give him something to look *at*. Nurse Edwards, don't stand staring about there; go and tidy all those beds up where we've finished, and tell Bates he's to stop wriggling." With a sharp snap of her scissors she cut another bandage down and mopped and cleaned another leg. "You can finish the last three, nurse," she said, "I'm going to see Sister now. Don't let me find anything in the bathroom or there'll be trouble. And, Parker, don't you let me see you turning and twisting once Nurse has tucked you in. You've just to lie still. I won't have it."

But before she could pull her sleeves down the ward door opened and Sister herself appeared. The ward groaned inwardly as it saw the set of her cap and little Edwards breathed, "Wind up official," down the back of Williams's neck.

Sister wore a look as of high tragedy. Her hand pointed down the ward, her glance was devastating.

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"Sister Denton, do you mean to say the dressings are not finished yet?" Her tone was terrible. The staff nurse meekly bent before the storm. "*My* ward too; don't you know that he is *certain* to come here first? That man has his boots the wrong way round. Come, come, man, don't you know the proper way to put a kit out yet, or have I got to stand here and teach you?"

She moved up the ward. Behind her Binks folded his hands as in prayer, his eyes heavenwards, his language, muffled but audible to his next bed neighbours, provocative of dangerously explosive mirth. The storm raged anew.

"Nurse Williams, just look at those corners! Do you mean to say you have been in *my* ward four months and can't finish a bed better than *that?* Go and unfasten the corners of those top ten beds and do them all over again. Sister, can't you see that these girls do their work? If *they* haven't any pride in the ward, I expect you to have. Are you sure all those dressings have clean bandages and that the splints are not messy? I have to see to *everything* myself, or it isn't done properly. Nurse Edwards, go and take *all*

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those cushions out of the linen-room—I won't *have* them in there!"

"Where shall I put them, sister?" The soft answer did not turn away wrath this time.

"Put them out of sight somewhere—they have *no* business here. And don't let me find anything under the baths. That man's locker is a perfect *disgrace*, sister."

The progress finished; the ward subsided into peace as Sister and her staff nurse went down the corridor to the other end of the block. Binks raised a cautious head from under the bed-clothes and felt gingerly for his top-knot.

"Thought it might have blowed off," he explained. "Blew a 'urricane round my bed, I tell you straight. Good Lord, if we was to 'ave inspection every day I'd be bald in a week! Straight I would."

"Lyin' here like a lot o' mummies." Stevenson's tone was aggrieved. "Mustn't smoke, daren't have a fag, gotter take all and say nuffin'. Catch me doin' a bit for my country; next war we have I'm a Conchie—that's what *I* am."

"'Nother hour and it ought to be over."

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Gunner Hopkins sat up very straight on his hard-backed chair. "Suppose I'll have to stand like a image for half an hour, while the old chap trots around and tells the sister what a fine 'ospital 'e'd 'a made of it."

"'What did you do in the great war, daddy?'" quoted Binks in soft falsetto. "'Kept my bed tidy and always clicked with the sister'—that's what *I'll* say. Come here, Hopkins, my son, let's put that collar an' tie straight; you're a disgrace to the ward—that's what *you* are. With a headpiece same as Sister's got on 'er this mornin' your life would be cheap at a bob if she was to come in and look at yer."

The minutes dragged on. Now and then the sound of footsteps in the corridor stimulated the ward to activity, but the sound invariably died away and the waiting began again. The bed patients tried to turn on their unusually lumpy couches, but found their fetters too strong; the men who were up wriggled uneasily on their hard chairs and yawned audibly and without reserve.

Nurse Williams and her fellow V.A.D., now immaculate in clean aprons crackling with starch, hovered between linen-room and

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kitchen, both anxious to be well out of the way when the august procession arrived. Sister Denton, however, drove them firmly from their hiding-places.

"No you *don't!*" she said emphatically. "Sister wants you both in the ward. She will go round with Matron and the general, and I must be ready when he wants the dressings taken down. One of you girls must be with me and the other can be ready to fetch hot water. Sister wants the orderly in the kitchen to show off the dinner arrangements there. I *hope* the bathrooms are all right. Did you see to the kits, nurse? And boys"—turning to the ward—"*have* you all got your red ties on and *are* your boots neatly laced? Mind you stand smartly to attention *all* the time he's in the ward. Parsons"—with an eagle eye upon the ward V.C., a modest youth who found his celebrity more than trying—"I hope you've got your ribbon up; don't scuffle your feet so. He won't be here more than twenty minutes. Hark!" Sister paused with a dramatic forefinger upward.

Nurse Edwards cautiously pulled the door open an inch or so.

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"He's come, sister," she said in a breathless whisper. "They're all going into the other end first. I can see Matron and Sister and a *crowd* of M.O.'s, but I can't see him. He must be in front."

"Shut the door, nurse, and go and stand by the table." Sister's little pink face was more cherubic than usual. Nurse tip-toed self-consciously up the ward and took up her position behind the flower-filled table.

Binks started a feeble croon, but was frowned into silence by Sister; and as the heavy tread of many feet came along the corridor the ward rose and prepared for its long ordeal.

Sister herself—all smiles now—flung the ward door open and came inside with Matron and a vague mass of khaki uniforms and parti-coloured tabs. The bed patients gazed eagerly—theirs was now the better part—and from the crowd a small spectacled figure of a meek aspect disengaged itself and made one step into the ward. Its eyes travelled mechanically down the long vista of beds and returned to smile up into Sister's face. She was tall, as the modern woman is.

"Very nice, I'm sure, sister. And now

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Colonel ——," addressing the C.O. of the hospital, "which was the block you wanted me to see before I went across to the Barracks?" And the neat erect little figure swung round on its heel and, attended closely by its satellites, vanished from the view of the astonished ward.

The door closed on absolute silence. Binks, the inevitable, broke it:

"Well, I'm damned!" he said genially; and voiced the feelings of the ward.

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A CONFERENCE OF THE POWERS

THE Northern Mail was on the point of starting and the departure platform at King's Cross was a mass of scurrying figures, peering anxiously into overcrowded corridor coaches where the already arrived, banked by mounds of luggage euphemistically described as "hand," gazed balefully down with the implacable expression of those determined not to yield one more inch of space. Khaki-clad forms, some burdened with the tin hat and other impedimenta of the trenches, some merely slung round with the innumerable articles deemed necessary for their comfort by a paternal Government, reconciled themselves to the inevitable corridor with a shrug and a Woodbine, and philosophic bluejackets, already in possession, squatted amicably on their bundles and prepared to make conversation.

The general public was rather more fretful,

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and at times even a little resentful of the passion for travel apparently shared by both Services, but fretfulness faded on a little shamefaced reflection induced by the scraps of conversation, which compared Blighty very favourably with that other war-scarred land from which so many of these travellers had just come and to which many of them would be obliged at no very distant period to return.

In the first-class coaches much the same order of things prevailed. Naval officers jostled their brethren of the New Army; the Air Force rubbed shoulders with an occasional beribboned Contemptible; and of the gilded staff there were not a few.

A trim, blue-clad figure standing at the door of one compartment had managed, however, by means unknown to the general public to keep for herself and her travelling-companions—one girl and one fox terrier—complete and splendid isolation, and it was with an expression of annoyance that she turned from the window as expostulations were heard in the corridor without.

"Henson, we shan't do it after all," she said to the other girl in V.A.D. uniform, who was mounting guard over the excitable

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terrier, and a miscellaneous collection of belongings which were strewing the seat. "I don't believe it was a scrap of good tipping those men. They're going to push some woman in with us, after all; I can hear her yelping in the corridor."

Henson shrugged a pair of shapely shoulders.

"I don't see what else you can expect; this train is invariably packed like a herring box and we always fill up at the last minute. Anyhow, I shouldn't imagine anyone would want to stop in here with Binks—he's eaten half my strap as well as his leash already. Come in from the window, Podgie, we're off. *She*'ll find a place somewhere. I'm sure he's soothing her—she's much quieter."

Podgie withdrew a reluctant head.

"There was a man over there *awfully* like Captain Frewnes," she said. "I wonder if he got leave at last? My dear woman, you're *all over* Binks! He moults like a hen and it sticks like the devil to this rotten blue serge. I wish they'd dressed us up in some other glad rags—you brush and brush half the day, and *then* look like a charity school at the end of it all."

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Henson rubbed a rather unclean handkerchief vigorously over her skirt with no apparent results.

"Cheap and nasty like the rest of the outfit," she said gloomily. "I'd like to get hold of the woman who invented this rig and wring her yellow neck. We're the oldest inhabitants if you reckon up the war-workers, and we've got the rottenest outfit of the lot. Look at the W.A.A.C.'s or the Wrens—even the Land Army—I don't wonder they get regular crowds of clamourers like butter queues, all waiting to join up; at all events, they do look like human beings and not like scarecrows."

"Indoor kit isn't too bad," said Podgie judicially, "if you knock out those rotten dust caps that ruin your hair. I suppose they invented those so we shouldn't look as fetching as the sisters; but this charity school outfit we have to buy at famine prices, *with* the allowance we got in the first year of war, absolutely puts the tin lid on. Why your own brothers tell you frankly they wouldn't be seen dead in it."

Henson thrust a detaining arm round

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Binks, who betrayed secret yearnings after suicide via the open window.

"Being dead in it wouldn't matter," she said. "What's more important is when your men folk don't want to be seen *alive* with you in it. Ever read that bit in the *Daily Mail*, Podgie? You oughtn't to have missed it—it was really rather priceless. All about the pretty Drone girl, you know, and what a 'world boon' she was to the tired soldier—how he liked gazing at her silk stockings while she punted him round and told him what coloured jersey she was going to buy in the summer sales. Said he liked her artless prattle because it led him far from war. I cut it out and sent it to Robert; I thought, perhaps, he might like to break off our engagement, as the story ran that 'no man who'd been in the midst of things wanted to be reminded that such things as hospitals and V.A.D.'s existed'—it was his fondest wish to get away from them as far as the earth would let him."

Podgie grinned appreciatively.

"What did *he* do?"

"Sent it back and told me not to vapour. All the same, I didn't forget it. It's rather

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the limit, you know, Podgie, when you've given up your hair and your hands and your insteps, and get as plain and old and flat-footed as—as—a maiden aunt in the service of your country, for the ungrateful beggars to turn round and say, 'Thanks awf'ly, but you're rather *passée* and I'm going out to tea with a flapper.'

"Heaven knows we haven't gone in for nursing for *that* sort of piffle—as a matter of fact, the flapper type wouldn't stick *our* life for ten days—but we *are* human and we like a bit of appreciation if we *do* look Aunt Marias!"

Podgie laughed as she scratched Binkie's brown velvet ears. She had a very nice comfortable sort of laugh that was like herself. Her sobriquets in hospital were many, and to the uninitiated perhaps unflattering, but they were all tokens of the sincere affection Podgie managed to inspire if she did turn her toes in.

"Well, anyhow the boys appreciate us if nobody else does and you can't deny *that*, Henson. Heaps of times I've felt positively ashamed when I think of all they've done for us and the little bit we can do for them. Yet just look at the fuss they make of us. Over

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and over again when I've had a fit of blues or when Sister's had the wind up, more than usual official, or if the laundry won't sent back more than *half* my aprons with their bibs still on, I've just given myself a poke and thought of the things a dear old Jock we had once said to me about the V.A.D.'s—and I've stopped grizzling.

"First year of the war I remember writing to a fearfully swagger matron—she was a Regular by the way, but I knew some of her people, and I just *grovelled* on the chance of getting abroad to do some real work. You know what we all felt those first months, and how we'd have scrubbed floors and washed dishes all day and all night, if they would only have let us go.

"Well, I wrote, and she answered it—quite the kindest letter, but it simply squashed me flat. She said that there wasn't the *slightest* chance of any untrained woman ever *smelling* France, much less ever nursing there, but that if I were a good girl and waited long enough I could doubtless do some quite good work helping the real nurses at home. Reads a bit funny now, doesn't it?"

Henson, who had been bombed in France

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and torpedoed in the Mediterranean, grinned appreciatively.

"Quite funny really—only it's got a side that isn't funny, you know, Podgie. I can't help thinking of the way the right girls have been wasted. There was such lots of enthusiasm at the beginning, and yet every one got so choked off that it isn't much wonder they have to appeal and appeal all the time for more V.A.D.'s. They're all gone to do other kind of war work where they aren't treated like pariahs. It does seem as if the War Office people ought to have had a bit more foresight; surely with a scrap of imagination somebody could have realized that the war wasn't going to be over in six months, and that lots of us would be needed for several years. Then they could have worked at some plan for a definite war-time training for us—not left us to work out our own salvation as most of us have had to do."

"Well, I'm jolly glad I had my first six months in a civil hospital anyhow," said Podgie. "Of course I was lucky to get in. I'd simply bombarded every hospital I could think of, and there wasn't one that would take me unless I'd sign on for the whole three

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years' performance. I managed to get a little backing and I was well in by October of '14, but it was worth the struggle. Now, when they rise up and tell me loftily that we V.A.D. girls haven't the least idea of the stiffness of a civil hospital training, and how the average pro. has to work there, it simply doesn't have the slightest effect! I've had some and I know. You may work harder in one sense and perhaps quicker—though I doubt it—but you *are* taught systematically and you get your lectures. Besides, you drop into things gradually; they come along by degrees, and you aren't suddenly plunged into the midst of startlers like some of the poor wretched things that come to us fresh from home or from one of these convalescent places."

A shadow darkened the doorway.

"What on earth are you two laying down the law about? I could hear you three carriages down and says I to myself, 'That's Podge and Henson or I'm a Chinaman.'"

Podgie's eyes grew nearly as big as saucers.

"Powers that be," she ejaculated, "Fitz by all that's lovely! Where in the world have you dropped from?"

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Henson dropped Binks heavily to the ground.

"But I thought you were down in the South of France. What's happened—leave or a new job?"

The new-comer, a tall slim girl in shabby travel-stained uniform, pushed the impedimenta on the seat further along and sat down.

"I suppose I may come in?" she laughed. And when Pamela Fitzgerald wrinkled her eyes up at the corners, and dimpled engagingly at the world, few people looked at her shabby clothes.

"Bring your kit along and join the party, of course," said Henson. "This is *great*, absolutely great—who would have thought that we three would travel together like this? Now tell the news, Fitzie, it's an age since we saw you!"

Fitzgerald settled herself comfortably in her corner and adopted the adoring Binks.

"I'll fetch my stuff later," she said. "At present I'm too comfy. How very smart you both look—I'm a wreck as usual. No, it isn't a new job—only leave with a bit of sick leave tacked on. I've wangled a month out

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of our dear old M.O., rather to Matron's wrath; but I don't mind much. I've been feeling awfully stale for a long time now and the latest was a touch of 'flu;' it's been raging out there. Podge dear, it's an age since I left the old shop. How's life—much as usual down there?"

"Oh, Podgie's no end of a swell," laughed Henson. "She's senior theatre V.A.D. and much too grand to look at the likes of us," dodging a neatly thrown magazine. "That's the reward of sticking to one shop for three years as she has done—I must say she deserved all her kudos, for she's not a bad old thing, our Podgie."

"Dry up, Henson," said the embarrassed Podgie, her face nearly the colour of her red hair. "You know what rot she always *did* talk, Fitz. Make allowances if you can—it's the leave fever that's got hold of her badly!"

Pamela smiled.

"It was topping all the same that you got the R.R.C., Podgie, though. Such lots of people seem to get hold of things who don't deserve them in the least, that it was quite a joy to see a really honest hardworking beggar like our Podgie having the reward of her

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many virtues. Don't rag, Podgie, I apologize!"

"How do you like the change from the north to the south, Pam?" said Henson. "We all thought you were going to Italy, but it turned out Southern France after all."

Pamela nodded.

"It was rather disappointing as a matter of fact," she said, "and I don't think you've missed a great deal by signing on again at home. The first part wasn't too bad—we were quite near Boulogne and there was always the feeling that we were in the middle of things. Also the work was quite good and they sent us plenty along. Every one pulled together—much better than I thought they would considering how they scrapped in the old shop. Of course, as *you* remember, Henson, there were one or two rather discordant elements—I rather think you were a sufferer at one time—but on the whole they played the game. And I'm bound to say there was a good deal more of the family-party feeling and less of the 'You are a worm and I am a trained woman' attitude—we were all too busy to fight! Remember little Smith-Preston? She got a lot of the

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side knocked out of her those first months in camp; and when you got rid of that she wasn't a bad old thing. I don't think they treated Monson any too well."

"Monson never was a favourite with the powers that be," said Podgie. "I never quite understood why—she was a ripping worker and as straight as a die. I worked a ward with her under Sister Stephens, and you remember what a Tartar she was for work? Well, Monnie always took her end and we got along capitally. I was her junior in those days too."

"She knew too much," chuckled Henson, "and she had a nasty little way of looking at people who shirked and weren't quite up to their job. Remember Sister Stephens licked her into shape; and if she was a stickler for work she was a ripping sister. What she taught you you weren't likely to forget, and there wasn't a sister in the hospital could touch her when it came to difficult work. She simply revelled in a ward of really rotten surgicals. I always remember the way she used to roll up her sleeves and send the staff nurses flying for odds and ends—they didn't half hate Sister Susie's little ways. Monnie

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had a lot of responsibility before old Stephens had had her long, and I suppose when she got over the other side one or two of them got their own back.

"She had over three months as home V.A.D. and you know what a lovely job that is, even in proper quarters. Over there it was simply rotten, and Monson stuck it out like a brick till the third month dawned. Then she struck—told Matron flatly she thought a General Service member might be brought over to wait on the staff. After all, she *had* come out for nursing and though she didn't grumble at a shift of scullery-maid-cum-waitress, she drew the line at permanent Home Service."

"Monson would get her own way in the end, I expect. She had rather a genius for that," laughed Podgie.

"But I've often noticed that it's rather fatal to get on too well in the wards; you are apt to find yourself unobtrusively shifted to some other job—anything *but* nursing!" Pamela stuck out a trim foot and gazed on it meditatively. "A lot depends on your charge sister," she said at length. "You can't label them all the same way: some are dears and some are cats, and there aren't any two alike.

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I've met sisters who are the biggest muddlers unhung and others who had a real gift for managing people and affairs. I've worked under some women whose ways I call right down slovenly—if we did things they did we'd be murdered !—and I've worked under some whose work was a liberal education even to watch. Some of them will notice you and say nothing for a while, and then if they find they can trust you they'll give you real nursing to do and *leave you alone while you do it.* Others you may work under for a year and at the end of that time they'll sneer at you for an ignoramus and a slacker and won't trust you to wash a patient."

"I suppose it's just the same with us—only that we're pitchforked into the life with no sort of preliminary—and *we* rather expect that their years of training will have disciplined them into all kinds of exceptional virtues and justnesses."

"What I can't fix up is this," said Henson suddenly sitting up with vigour. "We haven't any sort of *guarantee*—we're just dependent on people's moods and indigestions or whether their love affairs are prospering. Take me; if I left the shop to-morrow and

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went to a new one, I wouldn't step straight into a similar job. I'd have to begin at the beginning again. Why, it may even happen in the same hospital. Remember when I was on night in B 4, Podgie? I had a big ward absolutely on my own, with heavy surgicals. Well, what happens? I come off night; I go on days—there's a vacancy in C 11. I go there and I wash walls and polish floors for three months and the greatest excitement is when an epileptic throws a fit or two! Sister Perkins likes me, and, as the staff nurse in her ward is a lazy sort of girl who doesn't care for too much work, I do staff nurse work if I like. Sister Jones detests me, and I have to play second fiddle after three years' slogging to a little junior with a smirk who toadies to old Jones. *That's* what I can't stick and that's where the blessing of a three years' certificate comes in, for they can't play the trained people up like that.

"We didn't get too much of that up north, but when we moved south people had too little to do and I'm afraid it's starting," said Pamela. "Picnics are awfully nice and one doesn't mind slacking it for a bit, but I

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confess I'd rather be back where the work is. Every one is so much better tempered when the wards are full. Old Gibbs is in the officers' ward—we get in a few strays from the Italian front and of course men from the garrison towns on the coast—and she's having a very thin time of it, not even allowed to take a temperature! Poor old Gibbs! She is awfully sore, but I tell her it's one degree better than my blacks."

"*What* blacks?" asked Henson. "I did hear a rumour."

"Oh, they're French auxiliaries really, but they shifted a lot of them on to us and they *are* a scream! You have to get used to the whiff. 'Member Parsons—Baby Parsons with the turn-up nose?—well, when she first smelt those blackamoors her nose turned up so much that she's been rechristened 'Neff-Neff' on account of her nose's obvious disapproval of the 'nhiff-nhiff.'"

"Pamela! you horrid *wretch!*" Henson's tone was horrorstruck.

"Well, they *do*, you know," said Pamela good-humouredly. "It's no good blinking facts and the climate is distinctly warm. I've had a marquee full of the darlings and I

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can tell you it isn't unmixed joy when the sun is high. They have such funny little ways, too, and they're awfully fond of having rows. One night when I came on duty they were kicking up no end of a shine, and as I rather thought they were just ragging me to see how much I'd stand I left them alone for a bit, as there were one or two bad pneumonias in another marquee. However, in the end, I thought we'd have Sister round and I'd get into trouble for not maintaining order, so I thought I'd go and soothe them. It was about time, as when I got in there were two enormous blacks attired simply in their little short shirts, chasing each other round the tent with their dinner knives in their hands, while the rest of the ward cheered them on and threw sputum cups—mostly full—at them by way of encouragement."

"Pam, what an *awful* yarn!" Podgie gasped.

"Fact, my dear; it often happens. Well, I yelled at them in Serbian just to catch their ear, you know, then I made them hop into one bed—they went like lambs, and I just bumped their two frizzy heads together till they *rang* and I talked to them like a mother

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in pidgin-French. The rest of the ward simply loved it and I never had a bit of trouble afterwards. I told the orderly officer about it when he came round and I really thought he'd have a fit he laughed so!"

"Well, I thought your Serbian yarns were bad enough, Fitzie," said Henson reproachfully, "but this absolutely knocks them into a cocked hat."

"Truth is often stranger than fiction, my child," said Fitzgerald sententiously. "But I answer you there's nothing faked about that yarn. My dear Podgie, *could* anything be madder than some of the things the boys in K Block used to do in the old days when we were all up there? I'm certain if you told *those* stories to anybody outside a hospital you'd be taken for a raving lunatic! That's one thing I miss now we're south. It's nearly all medical work and you know what medicals are, depressed and ill, really ill in themselves, poor dearies. But give me a nice rowdy surgical block with nobody too ill in it to enjoy the fun. We *have* had some days!"

"Do you remember Tait and Browning and all that crowd, Fitz?" asked Henson. "They were all in on the same convoy and we had

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them for about four months—no, of course, that was before you came. Podgie and I were there together for about two months before you turned up and you were on night first. They were *some* patients!"

"Chair races were *their* special forte if I remember rightly," laughed Podgie. "Wheel-chairs weren't bad except when a whole crowd was going to a concert, and they *would* career madly down that awful slope in full view of all the visitors, who always glared at us as if *we* could make any impression on the boys' ideas of amusement! But when it came to *beds*—my hair used to turn grey when I imagined Matron sailing up the corridor. One night six of them had a bed race. There wasn't one of them could move a leg—they used to bump up and down and waggle forward till the cots moved. Tait used to get steam up and lead finely with Harvey a good second. That particular night it was such a dead heat that the winning two weren't content with the ward—they sailed right down the corridor and I was so weak with laughing I simply couldn't get them to come in for ages. Tait started buzzing pillows at old Browning; he never could resist that after

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Browning had that freak of having his head shaved like a convict. Do you remember how the major nearly died of laughing the day after Browning had his head shaved—he looked so exactly like a monkey? But they were *rather* lambs all the same—they'd never get you a wigging, and if there was the least hint of an inspection they'd stop the biggest rag possible and be like a lot of archangels."

Henson was suddenly overtaken by a fit of giggles.

"What's the joke?" asked Pamela, her eyes glinting with fun. "Tell me the yarn."

"Well, some idiot gave a box of Beecham's Pills for a booby prize at one of the whist drives and, of course, one of our heathens *would* win it and bring it up to the ward in triumph. Poor old Jacko was the sacrifice and I believe that first night there was absolute bedlam. Anyway they stuffed *two* down him, you see he'd only one arm available so he couldn't defend himself. Also he *was* so comic with his shaved head that he was bound to get ragged from morning to night—you couldn't make him cross whatever you did to him. Next day I was cleaning up the trolly just before dinners came up—I was

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on alone—when I heard a yell from Jacko. Down the ward I pelted and there were half a dozen of the fiends round his bed urging him, and not too gently, to take Beecham's Pills for the good of his health.

"It was pretty awful! They kept this up for about three days, and every time I heard a wail from Jacko I'd have to sprint down the ward and save him. I don't think he really got more than two or three, he was so canny, but I'll admit they had me neatly on toast one morning. I thought the craze had died down, and as they'd been having a mild rag with Jacko, and as his splint had come a bit unpadded, I told them to keep his dinner hot till I put it right for him. I *was* an idiot, I might have guessed that wretched pill would make its appearance—bang in the middle of his spuds too. I didn't see it, but Jacko did and you should have seen his wise old head nodding as he fished it out and hurled it across the ward at the Canary. They were the best of pals though—those two! Taffy was the funniest, he had to be propped up to see the fun. I shouldn't think anyone could forget Taff! The times I've hauled him up and down and over and over. I'm jolly sure

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I never thought when I first came into hospital that I would haul a six-footer about like that, if he *was* thin."

"Oh, you get your muscle up finely there, no doubt," nodded Pamela, "but I'm bound to say I think in the home hospitals you can get rather too *much* of that weight-lifting business. I don't mean as regards the patients, because naturally one would do anything for *them*. What I mean is the incessant floor polishing with those heavy dummies, and the perpetual wall washing that goes on and which is always shifted on to the V.A.D.'s shoulders."

"Oh, well, you see, that comes of not having any real position—that's just what makes our work so unsatisfactory. We came as stop-gaps and odd job workers and as that we shall probably remain. Even the orderlies can jib at times and say this or that isn't their work, but we are always available for a job somebody else thinks they'd rather not do."

"You miss a lot of charing abroad," said Henson thoughtfully. "I know that's one of the things I took badly to when I came back from Egypt. I've often wondered how it is

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one gets so much more of it in Blighty than out there; theoretically on active service it ought to work out the other way, but practically it doesn't."

"Oh, the M.O.'s are more *en évidence* on active service," laughed Pamela, "and they won't stand it—and that's *my* experience. But at home—well, one just has to do it or see the wards go down; or, which is worse, be ranked as a shirker whatever one's physical strength may be. Not that the patients like to see us slogging—they absolutely hate it—but it's part of the day's work in Blighty as far as we are concerned."

"And then you see the orderlies at home have been combed out and combed out to *that* extent," said Podgie extenuatingly, "that really they're such a fragile lot I'm always afraid if I ask them to do things that they'll have a heart attack or throw a fit of some sort."

"The only thing is," said Pamela lazily as she stretched her graceful length preparatory to adjourning to her own compartment, "I do hope we don't demoralize the boys *too* utterly with our robustnesses. The war knocked a lot of the silly stuffing out of most of them

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and it will be a great shame if we put it back. I don't want any woman's home life on *my* chest 'Après la guerre.'"

"Suppose I send Bill Jones back to his wife after he's got his ticket," went on Pamela, warming to her theme, "and Mrs. J. wants him to turn the mangle or peel potatoes while she rocks the baby's cradle. Sounds rather like the game where you pat your tummy and rub your hair; but it *can* be done. And suppose Bill turns on her with a pained expression and says, more in sorrow than in anger, 'When I was in hospital, Martha, the *nurses* would never let me do a hand's turn,' how should I ever face that woman suppose we were to meet friendly like? Why, I might be charing in her street —and you can't deny I've had a thoroughly good training in *that*. Think of the reproaches Mrs. J. would hurl at my unhappy head!"

"Pam, you're a bigger ass than ever," laughed Podgie affectionately. "Don't go—where are you off to now?"

"I must collect my ninety and nine belongings and you know what a free fight there is for porters at York always. I've

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left them in my compartment under the care of two nice Navy men. I'm afraid they'll think me rather casual, don't you know."

And with a gay wave of her hand Pamela vanished into the corridor and made her erratic way along to her own compartment, defying the surges of the train. Henson looked at her watch.

"We ought to run into York in about ten minutes," she said. "Pretty well up to time to-day for a wonder. Where does Fitzie live, Podgie?"

"Up the coast somewhere, near Scarborough, I believe, but it's a wee place off the map—I forget the name. Her father's the rector there I believe she once told me."

"I was jolly glad to see her again. We all missed her when she went abroad—she was such a real pal. One of the best, absolutely, and as straight as a die. They don't seem to send that kind along nowadays." And Henson regarded her rather sardonic countenance in the carriage mirror, with what ease she might in the face of the sprawling notice concerning lights in carriages affixed by the Great Northern Railway Company for the benefit of its travellers.

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The train pulled into York station, but Fitzgerald had not returned. They could hear her voice in the distance in amicable converse with unknown persons apparently of male persuasion, but it was from the platform that she finally hailed them.

The Navy formed a decorative and admiring background laden with Pamela's varied belongings. Porters, apparently, were lost luxuries, but Pamela's personality was one which soared triumphantly over such minor details.

"Did you think I'd absolutely vanished? Couldn't get a porter to look at me, so these two angels—don't look so shocked, Henson, I know the second cousin of one of them and I've dined with the other's aunt in pre-war days—took over all cares from my shoulders. My train's waiting and yours won't go for quite five minutes. You're going to be packed all the way to Edinburgh."

"What was that woman buttonholing you about, Pam?" asked Podgie curiously.

"Oh, the usual thing—took me for a porter. It's this garment of mine; I couldn't persuade her I didn't know all about the trains for Slocum on the Something. Wish

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I had, she might have tipped me. It would have been a change. Madge Durham and I once *did* wheel a female's luggage over the bridge at Gloucester for her; she gave us sixpence each! I haven't had so much fun over a sixpence before or since."

Henson and Podgie hung out of the window with equal firmness regardless of the agonized wails of Binks the neglected in the rear, and the steady influx of passengers into their compartment.

"Well, good-bye, Pam, old thing," said Henson stretching out a work-stained paw. "Hope it won't be long before we all say good-bye to uniform; I *shan't* be sorry to get into civvies for a bit."

"Yes, and when you're in them you'll be grizzling to get out of them," laughed Podgie. "You know as well as I do you can't keep away from hospital more than a month without getting bored stiff."

"Oh, yes, *now*," said Fitzgerald. "None of us can—we all growl and bubble and yet we're wretched away. Naturally; we feel out of it all and this is the nearest approach to active service *we* can get hold of. Wish I'd been born a boy. But 'Après la guerre.'

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Oh, *là! là!* Not this child. I shall be otherwise engaged."

"Take your seats. First stop Newcastle," shouted the guard hurrying along the train.

There was a final skirmish and then, with a piercing whistle from the engine, the long line of coaches moved slowly off. Pamela ran along the platform for a few yards regardless of restraining porters.

"Good-bye, Podgie, old thing, don't forget to write—you have my address. Good-bye, Henson, I'll send you those snaps." Till breath failed and she was obliged to content herself with frantic waves of both hands.

Henson and Podgie turned from the window with a mutual grin—their last sight of Pamela had been of a neat blue figure well wedged between two taller ones in blue and gold, its head still turned in the direction of the departing train, its arms still signalling and, to all appearances, its tongue still wagging furiously.

"Fitzie all over," said Henson appreciatively as she surveyed her belongings heaped together in some disorder by the endeavours of a stout lady, in attendance on a fat pug, to secure a seat for herself and her pet. "She's

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a pearl of great price and I don't think Binks had better be allowed to bite any more leather. He'll be setting the better feelings of our fellow-passengers against us if he's allowed to chew at random. Do keep an eye on him, Podgie."

Podgie sighed. The romance of the day seemed a little dimmed after Pamela Fitzgerald's departure. For a long time she sat silently gazing out of the window, while Henson wedged into a corner effaced her countenance behind a magazine. The only remark Henson made on the journey between York and Newcastle was not uncharacteristic.

"I wonder," she said meditatively, "if she really *had* dined with his aunt?"

But there was no answer. Podgie slumbered the sleep of the just V.A.D.

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VISITING DAY

A COLD wind blew gustily round the hospital, lifting and swirling the heaps of yellowing leaves lately fallen from the trees in the grounds, but within the wards all was warmth and comfort. Two o'clock had just struck and there was an air of expectancy abroad, though the Tuesday visitors had hardly yet begun their steep climb from the dockyard town to the hospital on the long hill which it crowned.

The peace of afternoon lay over the long wards, and the bright sunlight flooded them with light, mirroring the autumn flowers on the shining tables, and bringing out the glitter of the well-polished brasswork. Morning with its busy rush was over, and on visiting day nothing but the most essential of work was allowed to harass the sacred two hours when the hospital "received."

At the top of one of the wards in front of Sister's table sat the V.A.D. on duty, im-

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maculate in snowy cap, and spotless apron crackling with starch, her hands busy with rolls of gauze and cotton-wool as she stocked the huge dressing-drum standing before her. She, too, shared in the general air of peace and serenity, and it was difficult to associate her with the hurrying figure of the earlier hours of the day when grimy duties were toward and time pressed.

Being of a gregarious disposition, she often regretted that the high-pressure work of this heavy surgical ward prevented any but the most casual contact with the bulk of the inhabitants therein, and Visiting Day with its hours of priceless leisure was a welcome oasis for one who found in the varieties of human nature the most fascinating of studies.

As she sat at her work, her hands busy among the snowy piles of dressings, her eyes were alert and her smile ready. Round her a small group of patients made the most of this rare opportunity, and there was something homelike about the picture which was irresistibly soothing to men weary of war and the name of war.

The average man is not given to analysis,

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and the British army of to-day is largely made up of the average man, so it would have been difficult for any of the thirty men in the long room to put their thoughts into words. Yet had it been possible to do this for them, they would have agreed that the subtle femininity of the little scene was vaguely soothing. The group around the table laughed and joked with the intimacy of a family party; the men lying in their cots joined in the conversation with lazy satisfaction, and the girl in the midst guided the talk and drew the silent or depressed into the happy circle.

There was a certain sense of satisfaction, too, in pinning Nurse to a chair. All day long there was bustling up and down, the sound of hurrying footsteps, the passing smile and cheery word, but of continued contact there was none; and now that she sat there, occupied obviously for some time by her task, they were delighted by her stationary presence. "Kinder homy it looks," was the verdict of the long, lean Australian who sat on the edge of his cot nursing his pet kitten—only in the ward on sufferance and apt to be hustled rather suddenly under some one's bed-clothes at the approach of Authority.

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"Other days you're always on the scamper, sister—don't give a fellow more than half a chance to say 'Howdy.' Guess we'll keep you there now we've got you."

The V.A.D. laughed.

"Much use I should be sitting in a chair all day, Davidson. Who'd keep me here as a ward ornament? We've come here to work, don't you forget it. But I like this too, you know. I'm not saying I don't. Wonder if we'll have many visitors to-day," she went on. "They seem to be falling off a little lately. Perhaps your Melbourne lady will come again, Aussie." She turned to the big Australian. "You like her, don't you?"

"Well, it's kinder nice to meet some one that knows your own place a bit. You see, I haven't much use for these other ladies that come visiting; they're kindly enough, but I feel uncommon shy. I don't know their ways and they don't know mine; I generally make out I'm asleep when they come around."

"Are you expecting anyone to-day, Parsons?" The V.A.D. greeted a new arrival who came within the little circle.

"'Tain't likely I'll have the luck, nurse. My missus wants to come and bring the kids

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along, but the fares is that expensive I reckon she'd better wait. I'll be going to Con. Camp next week, and maybe they'll send me nearer home."

"How long since you've seen them, Parsons?" Her tone was sympathetic; she liked the quiet patient man who was so far from his North-country home.

"Nigh on two years, nurse, an' last time I was at home 'twas to bury my little 'un. Seems a pity like they can't fix up to send a chap nearer home. Comin' over on the boat there was a chap come round and took our names and where we lived, an' he says to me, 'You'll be all right when you get across—I've marked you for the North train.' And here I finds myself in Welsh parts." His tone was uncomplaining, but Parsons invariably accepted whatever fate chose to send along with the same quiet patience.

His next-door neighbour nodded.

"They allus do that—all't Yorkshire lads is sent ter't South an't Southrons is packed off inter Scotland. It's a kind o' game they play wi' a chap. 'Appen it's fer't good o't railway companies—puts a bit o' money inter their pockets, mebbe." He lit a pipe

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and puffed away rather savagely for a minute or two.

Davidson rose to his long length as the sound of footsteps in the corridor was heard. Then the ward door opened, and a bevy of gaily dressed damsels entered and spread themselves about the ward, choosing for preference the young and attractive patients, who received their guests with the calmness bred of much "square-pushing." Davidson sat down again—they were out of his line, he said.

The V.A.D. regarded them with a tolerant smile. "Keeps the boys cheery, any way," she thought, though the genus flapper was not particularly attractive to her. Soon the ward began to fill with visitors of every description, bearing offerings of cakes or flowers, cigarettes and fruit. Chairs were dragged to the bedsides, proffered dainties thawed the ice in the case of new acquaintanceships, and the ward resounded with the low hum of voices.

Here and there a little group of relatives round some bed patient included a father or brother—usually abnormally silent and very conscious of his hat, which he twirled

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nervously in his hands—but for the most part the visitors were women.

Taylor, one of the ward "Birds," was entertaining a party of six ladies from a neighbouring munition factory with perfect sang-froid; and, judging from the loud laughter which came from the little group, his efforts at amusement were not in vain.

Next to him Wallace—Big Jock, as he was always called to distinguish him from Wee Jock in the corner, the last-named carefully shepherded by the V.A.D. from tiring visitors—was endeavouring to persuade a worthy matron that the fact of his being in the Camerons did not of necessity make him the intimate friend of "Our Ted" of that regiment.

Further up the ward, Nevin and Forbes were conducting a stately conversation with two shop assistants whose grandeur was such that the two lads, though grateful for being singled out for such flattering attentions, were yet rather overwhelmed by the position. Conversation had indeed come to a rather embarrassing full stop when the V.A.D. came to their assistance by causing Nevin, regardless of his blushes, to produce the elaborate

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cushion cover he was embroidering, for the girls' inspection, and so set the ball rolling once again.

Over in the opposite corner a lady in an unnecessarily severe bonnet had pinned the unfortunate Fowler to a discussion on the war; and once again the V.A.D. had to come to the rescue—Fowler's eyes were rolling pathetically in her direction—and provide the lady with an antagonist better worthy of her steel in the person of Berrett, whose tongue would wag all day if he could persuade anyone to listen to him.

Davidson still stood by the table and waited till Nurse sat down again and resumed her work.

"Keep you busy, don't they?"

"Well, I like them to see the right people, Aussie." Nurse always found him a sympathetic listener. "You see it's a pity when a visitor who'd get on quite well with one man happens to sit down by another who likes talking about totally different things, and I enjoy sorting them out. Some boys like people who make them laugh; and others prefer the ones who don't talk at all, but just bring them things to eat or smoke. Now and

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then you get people who take the trouble to find out what a man *is* really interested in, and who will talk about that; then, of course, I like to see that they get their chance to talk together as long as possible. They don't want me fussing about too much—of course they don't when they're getting along all right—but I *can* head off the people who stay too long from the boys who are feeling tired, and sometimes one has to stop the visitors from giving the wrong kind of things to eat."

Indeed, each little tour of the ward afforded plenty of scope for tact: a noisy romping child who found the cradle over Saunders's leg irresistibly attractive had to be dislodged without offending its mother, who was so good in bringing dainties for the men's tea; an enthusiastic but garrulous visitor who was tiring Wee Jock by her flow of conversation must be tactfully guided to another bed; indigestible tea-cakes destined for a patient to whom they would have meant a night of horror must be confiscated without undue harshness—the leisure of the early afternoon wore thin! But the Committee Lady was the V.A.D.'s greatest trial—she who came with

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airs of great authority and a basket of dainties which must be divided in exactly such and such a manner, quite regardless of ward circumstances which might render the distribution difficult.

The V.A.D. repressed a sigh as this Being made her usual vivacious entrance and sailed up the ward without the mere courtesy of a "Good afternoon."

"She's left something, sister," was Davidson's quiet comment. "Left her manners, I guess—maybe the school she went to, they didn't teach 'em."

Nurse gave a tiny shrug of her shoulders.

"I daresay she doesn't mean it, Aussie. We can't all be alike, but I'm glad there aren't many like her. Most of them are so *nice*. It's such a pity—she always manages to ruffle some one during the afternoon, and it's so tiring making peace. Oh, well, it's all in the day's work. Is Sergeant Chalmers awake yet? I wish you'd have a look at him while I finish these swabs. We mustn't leave him too long, he gets mopy, poor boy."

Davidson put the kitten in his coat and moved stiffly over to one of the cots. The boy lying there opened weary blue eyes with

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a faint smile as the long Australian limped up to him.

"Feelin' lonely, kid?"

"No, thanks, I've been asleep, I think. What time is it?"

"'Bout half after three. Wake up, old son, here's little Sister wondering about you. Missing all the pretty ladies too, you are, drowsing away the time like that."

Sergeant Chalmers smiled again.

"That's why I went to sleep," he said in his slow way. "Got all the girls I want to look at *here*," with a little bend of his head toward the morocco case that was never far from his one remaining hand.

The V.A.D. finished her swabs and went into the little kitchen which opened off the big ward. Presently she returned with a cup of warm milk.

"How's that, sergeant?" as she skilfully adjusted his pillows and gave him his milk.

"Fine, nurse. I'm in the pink to-day—shan't be so long now."

The girl gazed pitifully at the little mounds where pillows propped what had been left of an arm and a leg after German H.E. had finished with Sergeant Chalmers. The boy's

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face was very lined and drawn, but his smile was indomitable. Davidson put the kitten down, and the thin hand went out to stroke it.

"Jolly little beggar you've got, Aussie; think I'll bag her for a change. She's the best kind of visitor—doesn't want to know when the war's goin' to finish and can't ask you where you're wounded and what it felt like to go over the top. Oh, you're a stunner," with a tweak of the little creature's velvet ear. "Not but what I like a bit of a change," the boy went on as if fearing he had been ungracious. "I like the little old lady that brings the watercress in. D'ye know, Aussie, she walks miles to get 'em just because she thinks they'd be a bit of relish for the fellows' tea—and she isn't as young as she was by a long chalk."

The Australian nodded.

"That means something," he said. "Guess most of 'em has sons or brothers fighting over the other side, but a lot seem to talk as if we was one side of a line and they were the other."

The V.A.D. was still standing by the side of Sergeant Chalmers's bed.

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"I've often wondered," she said, "what kind of visitors the boys really like best. Of course I don't mean their own people—naturally there couldn't be anyone like *them*—but just the ordinary people, who come in and out. I don't *think* the lady with the texts is very popular—she's so severe. I'm rather afraid of her myself, and I'm always sorry when she fastens on a bed patient because he *can't* get up and go away. It seems a mean advantage to take."

The two men laughed.

"I reckon you're right," Davidson said. "I've done some sleeping myself—with my mouth open—when she's around."

"Jock—Wee Jock—generally does the same," said the V.A.D. demurely. "But he was caught this afternoon—I had to rescue him twice. Mrs. Downey brought some lovely cakes up to-day from the Red Cross. We'll have plenty for tea, so I must forgive her if she isn't quite one of my favourites."

Sergeant Chalmers looked across at the offending lady.

"I'd sooner have a cake somebody'd baked themselves or an egg that somebody's own hens had laid—seems to mean more

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somehow—not but what the other's welcome but 'tisn't quite the same. I don't know quite how to say it."

But Nurse understood. In the fourth year of the War the personal element became considerably submerged in the Committee—there was more excellent management but less of humanity itself. It was a point she did not encourage the men to dwell on and she switched the subject away with a little laugh.

"If I ever gave up nursing, I don't think I should ever *dare* to come into the wards as a visitor—I should feel so shy!"

"Why, it seems as if you'd always be welcome wherever you went, sister." Thus Davidson from the edge of the sergeant's cot.

The V.A.D. shook her head.

"No; it would be different. Here I'm in my own place—even if I go to another ward, though it isn't as homy, still I belong. But I should never know what to talk about if I were an outsider. What do *we* talk about in the wards? Just little things that happen among us—silly jokes and 'shop.' They wouldn't amuse anybody *but* us, I suppose. I simply couldn't tramp into a ward full of strange men with a basket of goodies on my

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arm and march around from bed to bed trying to think of fresh things to say. Why I'd never get past the first—I should turn tail and run!"

Davidson lit a cigarette and sat down stiffly on the side of Sergeant Chalmers's bed, a very gentle look in his hard grey eyes as he watched the boy. The kitten had curled herself up into a little ball and had gone to sleep in the crook of the sergeant's arm.

Presently, with another glance round the ward, the V.A.D. moved across to Wee Jock's bed, altered his pillows and cracked a small joke, then she settled down again in her chair by Sister's table, and began to pad a splint.

The ward looked very peaceful in the late afternoon light, and the happy little groups scattered up and down its length reminded one less of hospital than of home life. One forgot the pain and the wounds—the suffering which lay underneath the light laughter.

The uglinesses of healing lay buried out of sight, and only the seeing eye might penetrate beneath the armour of imperturbable good humour which is part of the splendid courage of our men.

Into the midst of the light-hearted gaiety

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came a sharp reminder of the realities of war. There was a sound of hurrying footsteps and, as the ward door was pushed open, the staff nurse from the twin ward on the other side of the corridor came breathlessly up to the table. The V.A.D. rose at her approach.

"Yes, sister?" she said quietly.

"Get two beds ready as quickly as possible; hæmorrhage cases from a hospital train; convoy for Weychester, but they've had to drop these two here—daren't take them any further. They're both in the theatres now—be up directly. We've no beds, you must take them both. I'll be back in a minute. Clear these people if you can."

She vanished as quickly as she came, and the V.A.D. pulled off her cuffs and rolled up her sleeves.

As she flew about preparing the beds and filling hot-water bottles, she had little thought to spare for the wondering visitors.

The illusion of peace had fled—the quiet ward was now an arena where once more would be fought that grim battle between life and the Angel of Death.

As the screens were drawn about the further side of the two cots, the ward began to

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empty. One by one the outsiders tip-toed to the door, as if already they were in the presence of the Shadow, whispering good-byes to their friends and hurrying along the corridor as if fearing acquaintance with unknown terrors.

Almost before the last one had crossed the threshold the creak of the theatre trolly was heard, and even as the ward doors were pushed open, and the nurses made ready to lift the quiet burden from the stretcher, another of England's men crossed the Great Barrier, beaten in his last fight.

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AFTER HOURS

THE night was very hot. Even the pavements gave out heat to the feet which trod them; and the air, limp and stagnant, had no refreshment in it.

A thick haze lay over the town like a grey pall, hanging lowest on the mean streets leading from the crowded dockyards, where lights burned faintly as the work of repair went on by night and day.

Steep hills crowned the straggling town, but even on their heights the air was still, and the network of houses which clung to their slopes left little space for wholesome winds to blow through.

The clank and jangle of the squealing tram-cars dinned perpetually in the ears, and up and down the hot streets, past the shuttered shops, the wandering crowds sought pleasure after the day's work. The hum of many voices made an undercurrent, subdued yet insistent, for the noise of traffic; stray

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taxis bleated their warning to the heedless mob which idled up and down the main street; and paper boys shrilled their news to apathetic ears. Munitionettes jostled burly sailors; khaki-clad soldiers rubbed elbows with Marines from a British warship lying in dock; and little shop-girls of the town walked arm-in-arm with miners from the valleys. There was much loud laughter and very little real merriment, for the oppression of the night laid hold of the least imaginative.

In the hospital above the hill the sick men tossed uneasily on their beds. In the brick-built sisters' Quarters, midway between the hospital and the restless town, the heat of the day seemed to have soaked into the very walls.

Some of the wide-flung windows faced the street and the bourdon hum of voices came up with a wearying iteration, the clang of the tram bells punctuating it with relentless persistency from time to time.

A pungent odour of recent cooking mingled and blended with the incense of many previous meals, and floated up the steps from the basement kitchens till it reached and added reminiscence to the hot air of the fourth floor.

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Number Five dormitory faced the gravelled school-yard, its windows overlooking the huddle of roofs which lay below. The room was very quiet, though the juniors in the crowded hall without held high revel in their tiny cubicles.

Seven people were pursuing their usual after hours occupations in Number Five; but no one talked—mainly because they were all too hot and too tired, incidentally because every one knew the exact opinions of every one else on any known subject lying within the province of mutual comprehension.

There are days, and more particularly nights, when an utter weariness of the society of her fellow-workers is apt to invade the spirit of the V.A.D., when tempers already worn thin by the strain of heavy convoys on a hot day after months of strenuous work are apt suddenly to give way and cause cyclonic disturbances, regretted afterwards, but apparently unavoidable at the time.

As a particularly piercing burst of laughter came from the Square, the girl lying limply on her bed in the cubicle nearest the dormitory door turned fretfully.

"If they'd only be quiet for ten minutes."

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An invisible voice answered, sympathetic to the exasperation in her tone:

"I know—isn't it awful to-night? If one could only get away; but they just go on *and* go on."

There was silence again, then a loud bumping at the door. The girl on the bed dragged herself wearily up and stuck her feet into the heelless red slippers standing by her chair.

"That's Martin, I expect," she said, to no one in particular, and opened the dormitory door to allow the girl who stood there to propel herself and her heavy cabin trunk to the empty cubicle which was now to be hers.

Martin gave the trunk rather a vicious kick as the two girls pushed it into place under the narrow bed.

"I'm perfectly sick of this game," she said.

Eve Heriot nodded sympathetically. She had "changed over" from night to day duty too many times in her three years of V.A.D. nursing not to appreciate the sorrows of moving one's entire possessions at the end of a hard day's work.

"I'm simply fed up." Martin unbuttoned her stiff linen collar and flung it on the floor.

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"More than usual, I think. Perhaps it's the weather—*Lord*, isn't it hot in here? I shall never sleep, and I didn't get more than half an hour this morning—they were making a horrible racket outside the night quarters. It is really too bad; I shall complain to Home Sister about it. I was just dozing when they called me, and really I've been half asleep all the rest of the day. I don't know what Sister Lewis thought of me—they've put me back on D Block, thank goodness."

"I'll help you up with the rest of your things."

Eve's tone was grudging, but Martin's sigh of relief and her "You are a saint, Heriot" was sufficient compensation for the very real effort which the offer implied. A delicate girl, V.A.D. nursing against the wishes of her entire family, Eve Heriot's life was at present one long struggle against fatigue; and she was beginning reluctantly to admit to herself that the limit of her strength had been reached if not passed.

Martin shook herself briskly like a small terrier and got up from the bed where she had been sitting.

"*This* won't make the baby a pair of

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socks," she said. "Eve, don't sink into a state of coma; let's get the stuff up and you can go and have your bath and book one for me while I'm putting everything straight."

She gave the other girl a little push. Eve, like an automaton, followed her down the flights of stone stairs to the deserted night quarters, and helped to carry Martin's miscellaneous belongings upstairs, load after load till the last was reached and their owner, who had relapsed into a state of cheerful profanity, began to busy herself with their bestowal.

The tiny cubicles, almost like ships' cabins, had sufficient space within their white board walls to sling the proverbial cat in, and little more.

Opposite the narrow camp bed, a nondescript piece of furniture, comprising the offices of wardrobe, cupboard, dressing-table and wash-hand-stand, filled up the wall space. One chair occupied the few remaining inches, but it was still possible with care to move and turn without too painful a scraping of the anatomy against sharp edges, and by sitting on the bed it was possible to open and

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investigate the contents of the drawers in the chest without spilling all the worldly possessions of a V.A.D. on the floor.

Many months of this life had taught the owners of the cubicles the painful necessity of "tidiness" in their daily life—the only other alternative being a waste of precious off-duty time in the endeavour to find missing property.

Martin worked busily in her cubicle, stowing away garments, hanging pictures and tucking photographs into every available ledge. She belonged to the not innumerous tribe of women which calls no habitation "homelike" unless it is so full of articles of "bigotry and virtue" that there is small space for breath or movement.

She had the happy faculty of enjoying the little details of life, and her tiny room and its arrangements were real sources of pleasure to her.

Eve Heriot, called for inspection, admired as in duty bound, but her smile was a little ironical as she surveyed her own cubicle, bare of photographs and souvenirs. Her taste, cultivated in a different school, was unerring and instinctive; but at present her

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vitality was at too low an ebb to make anything "worth while" and the day's work was sufficient to exhaust that little reserve of strength that was left to her.

It was less the actual work of the wards than the monotony of the routine life, and the enforced companionship of uncongenial society, which wearied her at times so inexpressibly; but three years of this life had taught Eve Heriot that feelings of this kind are best sternly suppressed. The atmosphere of hospital is almost as alien as that of a public school from what is "strange" or unusual; the type that best finds favour is that of the commonplace, and the V.A.D. who most nearly reaches perfection in the eyes of the majority is the nice girl of fiction, with never a hair out of place on her well-brushed head, nor an idea out of position in her well-ordered mind.

With another of her small ironical smiles as she thought of these things, Eve picked up towel and sponge and descended bathwards.

Down in the big bathrooms the usual pandemonium raged. Given a staff of a

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hundred and fifty souls, all seeking cleanliness with passionate zeal at the same hour, there are apt to be recriminations over limitation of the necessary apparatus.

A small but earnest queue waited outside each cubicle; and above the splashings and gurglings, as water ran in and out, shrill arguments as to priority were debated between the invisible bathers and those about to bathe.

Eve came slowly into the hot steamy air of the bathrooms and joined one of the waiting queues. A large sponge—very full of water—suddenly appeared over the top of one of the cubicles and flying through the air descended with a splash on her head.

Obviously it was meant for an opposite cubicle, and ordinarily she would have taken it for a joke and hurled it back with a pungent remark or two.

To-night she frankly snapped, and the abashed contrition of the harmless junior whose sponge it was merely added fuel to the fire. A wait of ten minutes did not improve matters, and it was a very injured Eve who finally swept to her bath with considerable dignity, and an utter disregard of the dis-

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astrous effect of a not too clean floor upon the tail of a smart dressing-gown.

In the next cubicle a voice was upraised in "Down Texas Way," with a singular lack of harmony and a delightful disregard for the opposition chorus of "Killarney" chanted with fervour by two Irish girls from Cork. Farther along, a shrill discussion as to the relative advantages of rival brass polishes was being held by two juniors—the mental atmosphere of the junior V.A.D. being largely composed of a blend of cleaning rags, floor polishes and dusters with an admixture of soap.

Over the top floated fragments of conversation, wardese in character, and necessarily shouted to overcome the confusion of other sounds—taps turned on to their full, water rushing in and out of the baths, songs by so-called singers, wails of lamentation over lost pieces of soap and recriminations over the length of time required by *some* people for their personal ablutions—regardless of the acute discomfort of the heated crowd without.

Eve soaped and splashed in deep depression for a while, but no "blues," however indigo,

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can withstand the comforting soothing influence of hot water on a wearied body. Despite herself, her mood of depression relaxed as she arrayed herself once more in the frivolous dressing-gown, disapproved by half the hospital and envied by the rest, stuck her feet into their absurd scarlet leather slippers, slung her towel round her neck and made her way up the stairs again.

Half-way up, a window gave upon the distant hills. Over the tops of the huddled house roofs they stood out like dim giants in the fading light, their summits still lighted by the last rays of the sun.

Eve leaned her elbows on the grimy sill—the maids ignored the side windows with joyous unanimity—and stood quite still, filling her eyes with the peace of the hills.

An arm was slipped round her shoulders and a face smiled into hers as she looked round.

"Looking at our hills, Evie?" The voice was very pleasant. "That's the only thing which reconciles me to this dreadful town. I do love my hills and we're not shut off from *them*."

Eve leaned back a little against the other girl's shoulder. There was something very

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strong and comforting about Margot Blake as she stood there in her shabby outdoor uniform.

"I am glad you're back, Blake. We've all been getting as cross and flat as possible without our old lady. Had a nice leave?"

"Very. I've done most of the things I meant to do, and seen most of the people I wanted to see."

"Did *he* get leave?"

Margot flushed a little.

"A week; we had a *perfect* time—if it weren't for the end. Though I wouldn't have him *not* go back," she added hastily. "He'd hate not to see it through—now. Only saying good-bye seems to get worse each time. I wish I could get to France. It would seem a little nearer."

"Can't you get Matron to send you?"

"She knows I want to go, but of course I've never said much. After all, I'm not the only one."

"Did you have a very dreadful journey and have you had anything to eat?"

"The train was absolutely packed. No, I did think I'd have supper when I got here; but when the familiar odour of cottage pie

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met me at the gate plus the smell of stewed tea, I felt I couldn't face it, so I just came straight up. I thought some of you would be certain to have something."

Eve picked up the tail of her dressing-gown firmly; her weariness fled before the necessity for action.

"Poor dear old thing!" she said. "Go and have a bath and I'll get some food for you. I know that 'Back from leave' feeling! It's all right when you get into harness again, but when you come up those steps, and the shades of the prison house close round you once more, it catches you round the throat a bit."

Margot Blake laughed despite herself.

"You're not allowed to talk heresy, Heriot."

Eve turned from the step above.

"My good woman, I only say what you all *think*. You can't tell me our life is all unalloyed bliss. It isn't the nursing we jib at—it's this awful life down here. I don't believe women were ever made for barrack-room existence."

"Where am I, do you know?"

"Number Five again, thank goodness. I've made Home Sister's life a burden till she

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promised to give it back to you. Martin's there—she's not a bad old thing—and the three of us ought to fit in. The rest are harmless but trying: half of them are sewing mad and work their old sewing-machine all night, the rest talk shop till the cows come home."

Eve vanished round the bend of the stairs, and Margot picking up her suit-case followed more slowly.

"Buy an 'am an' see life," quoted Eve, a quarter of an hour later as Martin and Margot Blake, seated on her bed, were drinking her excellent coffee and sampling her sandwiches. "I didn't exactly buy it, but my Aunt Mary, who has *excellent* sense in the matter of tuck boxes, sent it me yesterday. I hadn't any tea, Martin, so thought you'd forgive the coffee for once. *When* you've quite finished we'll sample the De Reszkes our dear friend Miss Blake has so thoughtfully provided. I haven't had a fag all day."

She settled the pillows more comfortably against the back which was so prone to ache these days, and poured out another cup of coffee for herself.

"Coffee is one of the never failing joys of

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life," she added thoughtfully. "In fact, food altogether is a thing I'm never tired of; it fails one far less than lots of other amusements—or people. Don't look at me with that pitying expression, Margot, I really mean it. I can get fearfully sick of people, but I rarely fail to appreciate a good dinner."

"You might if you were sure of it every day," Martin said in her dry way. "Being a V.A.D. might make a difference, you know—there's always a gap to be filled with us. Also, by the way, I haven't seen *you* showing much appreciation of our dainty meals lately; the odd times I have happened to come across you, you might appear to have been keeping body and soul together on strong coffee. Very bad for the liver."

"I haven't got a liver," Eve snapped. "You see too much, Martin. Anyway, how can anybody eat this weather; at all events, the tack we get here."

Margot put up a lazy hand.

"For any sake, children, don't scrap—it's far too hot."

Martin subsided and lit a cigarette. For a few minutes they sat in silence, Margot watching the other two unobtrusively from

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her corner as she blew neat smoke rings through each other. She was a keen student of that most fascinating of all books—the book of Humanity; and behind her tender steadfast eyes lay a deep and widening knowledge of men and women. War had left its mark upon her face, as indeed in some measure it had upon all those girls who, widely differing in character and personality, wore the garb of the V.A.D. It is impossible to live in daily contact with the aftermath of war without being forced to think, and think very seriously at times. Such thoughts put shadows behind the eyes and change the expression of a mouth. But whatever of joy or sorrow Margot Blake had known in these four years of war, her eyes were very peaceful now and the firm lips held no bitterness in their curving lines. She had won through to the inward peace which war's alarms cannot disturb; but of her journey there she never spoke.

Eve's little white face showed drawn and haggard under the pitiless glare of the electric lamps, and her eyes were dark stormy lakes of unfathomable depths. She had withdrawn herself completely from her surroundings and

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Margot, looking across at her, saw that her mind was far away. Martin was quiet too, and Margot smiled across at her abstracted face.

"What are you thinking of, Martin?" she said.

"Hens." The answer was unexpected and Martin's tone vaguely wistful. "I was just thinking of my chickens and wondering if I'd done the right thing to give up my little farm when the war began. Of course we didn't know then that food was going to be so important and I didn't know I should miss them all so much. You see I've always lived an outdoor life and had lots of creatures to look after. I expect you'll think me a silly ass, Margot, but I'm missing them *dreadfully* just now. I feel I'd give anything to potter about with a straw in my mouth, so to speak, and hang over gates and look at my hens! I *want* to—and you see I've signed on for 'duration' here, so it isn't much use. And at the beginning of the war if you wanted to do things it *had* to be nursing or nothing—there weren't any land workers then and I should have felt an awful beast just happily going on with my creatures."

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Margot nodded.

"I know just what you mean; we all get it. It's gardens with me; there are days when I'd give anything to work in my own way in my own home. They write and tell me how all my special bits are getting on and I wish they wouldn't; it makes me feel so dreadfully homesick! Or rather garden-sick. I want the smell of it all—you know what I mean—after it's been raining, when the sweet-brier is so heavenly; wet earth, and the fallen leaves when October comes."

"And I'm tired of being brisk and efficient." Martin laughed at her own lugubrious tone. "I've got the 'potter craving' very badly to-night. I want to be free to do what I want in my own time and in my own way, and I want to hear less of the 'Yes, sister,' 'No, sister' stunt." Martin lit another cigarette.

Margot went on as if she were talking to herself.

"Autumn *is* the worst, I think—even worse than spring. The heather and the turf stacks, and those heavenly mornings when the mists clear off and leave a thin blue sky. Air like champagne——"

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"*Don't,*" Eve's voice broke in. "And we're here. Listen to them—listen to it all."

Over the cubicle tops, the fragments of conversation held between invisible occupants and their guests crossed and interwove.

"And Sister told him off beautifully—said if she had any more trouble——"

"Jones, do have this cocoa—there's really another cup."

"Well, if you ask me, I should say she'd never been in hospital before. Of course you've only to look at her work——"

"I can't get this seam right. Billy, do come and show me. I cut it by the pattern, but it doesn't look a *bit* like yours somehow."

"Of course the moment I saw her in mufti I knew what she was. Lots of them look quite all right in uniform but put them in ordinary clothes——"

"Well, we got him into bed and I flew for hot bottles and, of course, there wasn't any boiling water."

"She's awfully keen on him—I should think the whole ward noticed it. Perfectly ridiculous at her age too."

"Did you notice how cross Major Briggs

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was over that report being lost. You know she really *is* getting careless."

"If it goes on much longer I shall go straight to Matron—I simply won't stand it. I've put up with a good deal——"

"Never left me a drop of milk for the night. How they expect I'm going to look after fourteen milk diets with that quantity I *don't* know."

"So the orderly came round and Sister sent him flying for Jones."

Margot laughed in spite of herself.

"Eve dear, I know it's a bit trying, but the poor things must let off steam now and then. And, after all, it is our life—we're absolutely shut into the wards and each other. I never realized till this leave how *frightfully* narrow the best of us are apt to get. The absolutely out of touch with the outside world. Our work ought to broaden us if we'll take it the right way; but I'm afraid we don't—we narrow ourselves and we needn't. I know it's difficult; people outside don't realize *how* difficult. One gets tired and then it doesn't seem worth while changing into outdoor uniform and toiling out to have tea with some person who asks

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one as a kindness, or fagging at tennis or music. But it really *must* be done, or one will grow into the cat type, or talk shop from morning till night.

"You all screamed at me for learning to fox-trot last spring; but I didn't care. It took me right away from hospital, and if my feet got more tired my mind didn't!"

Martin nodded assent.

"I know what you mean—we shall all be fearful fossils before the end of the war. We drop out of everything so and lose interest in everything but our day's work. I know *nothing* of what is happening in the big world; why, I scarcely read even a newspaper these days. I hear snippets from the men in the wards and that's all."

She got up stretching shapely arms above her head.

"Sorry I must go, or I'll drop asleep here and now. Thanks awfully for the coffee, Eve, old thing. See you in the morning. Good-bye, Blakie. I'm going to bed to dream of hens." And with a little laugh she disappeared behind the green curtain.

Margot looked again at Eve's listless face.

"What is it, Heriot?" she said very gently.

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"There's something more than usual to-night. Would it help to talk—don't, of course, if you'd rather not—or shall I say good night and give you a chance to get to bed? You look awfully tired."

"No, don't go." Eve's hand clutched her skirt. "I'd rather you stayed. I've been so miserable all day. Do you remember my little Shannon?"

"The boy who was so ill—he's not—not?"

"Yes, he died in the night. I can't believe it yet."

"Poor old girl! I know that must have cut you up."

Margot's face was very tender.

"You know, Blakie, he was such a little brick. All these weeks he's been as cheery and bright as possible; so grateful for the least little thing one did for him. Always 'Champion, sister' if you asked him how he felt—even when he was so weak he could hardly breathe.

"This week he's been so much better. I couldn't help hoping, though Sister warned me not to expect too much. Yesterday afternoon I did him up all nicely because I

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knew I'd be off duty at night, and I never let anyone else do things for him if I could help it. He had a smart new pyjama coat. We had such fun over it—I told him it was his 'square-pushing' coat. And he would have his hair parted very specially. I—it—you don't *know* what that kiddie was to me. Such a youngster to have suffered so much." Eve's voice failed a little.

Margot put a hand on her shoulder.

"Gently, dear, gently," she said in her quiet way.

"We had great plans for to-day. Of course he couldn't talk much, but he seemed happy and bright, and he tried to wave his hand when I said good-bye at five o'clock. I didn't know there wasn't going to be a to-morrow for him. He *had* been bad earlier in the afternoon but it was so hot and airless we thought it was just that, and he was better at tea-time.

"When I went on duty this morning, Morris said 'Shannon's gone.' I didn't know what she meant for a minute. I thought stupidly of another hospital—you know how one's mind doesn't grasp things always. 'He's dead, Heriot,' she said. And even *then* I

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couldn't take it in. I just felt horribly sick. I couldn't do anything.

"Afterwards Morris told me about it. He was worse when the night people came on, but about ten o'clock Morris got very worried and she fetched Sister. He was talking to himself when they got up to him —very faintly—Sister had to stoop to catch the words. 'I didn't deserve this,' he was saying. 'I never did anything to deserve this.' And in a moment or two he died.

"Margot, I feel as if I can't bear it. It seems as though my poor little laddie was just saying what thousands of the boys must have felt, big strong boys who wanted to enjoy life and do things in the world, and they'd had to give it all up and go away—somewhere. They must be so *puzzled*. And they haven't deserved to suffer. What are we that we should be safe behind *their* lives. Can't you say anything to help, Margot? My mind just goes on and on the whole day. It seems so needlessly *cruel*—why must they go?

"I went to give him some flowers to-night and he looked—it's a foolish word but it is the only one I can use—so *noble* as he lay

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there. I suppose he was just a rough boy—before the War I should never have noticed him—but there must have been something really beautiful inside, or he couldn't have looked as he did to-night. I wonder if he has got the answer to his question, Margot ? "

Margot's voice was not quite steady as she replied :

" I am certain he knows. I am very sure they all *know*, child. Only—it makes one walk very humbly."

" I couldn't go into his little ward for a long time this morning—I dreaded seeing his empty bed. The men were very good—I know they understood. I've never been such a coward before, but I *loved* that kiddie—he was such a little brick. I don't want him back—not for him to be tired and ill—but I can't bear to think of it all being spoilt for him—it's a riddle I can't read."

Margot's eyes were very patient—the eyes of a woman who has learnt to wait through long lonelinesses.

" My dear," she said very gently, " thank God that you are not asked to read it. All we have to do is wait and not grieve. I am very sure that we hurt *them* when we grieve.

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Our poor humanity was never meant to carry the sorrows of the whole world. If we just do our work and believe that one day we *shall* read the riddle, we shall make their passing easier."

The noise in the dormitory grew less, and one by one the guests departed. Margot listened.

"There's Sister coming; I must go or the lights will be out. Good night, my dear, and try to be happy about your little Shannon; think of him free of all his burdens. And Evie, there's to-morrow's work, you know."

The door opened and Sister spoke:

"Good night, nurses."

There was an answering "Good night, sister" from the dormitory, then darkness and the peace of night descended.

For a long time Eve lay staring into the hot darkness, her mind still pondering over these problems of life and death which war with all its realities has forced upon us all. Then her eyes closed and like the rest of the weary girls around her she slept the deep sleep of exhaustion.

In the hospital above the hill the nurses

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moved quietly about the silent wards where the red lights burned dimly.

And not far away, under flowers and the soft light of the altar candles, the boy Shannon lay sleeping in a deeper peace than any, one of the thousands who gave their all that others might have safety. Behind the altar lilies the banner of Britain blazed against their whiteness, red as the blood shed for her honour, blue as the sea, which holds rich harvest of dead heroes fallen in her service, white as the souls, purged, by their supreme sacrifice, of gathered stain, making now invisible harmony for our earthly chorus.

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THE TALE OF A SHIRT

"NURSE, I want you. Can you spare a minute?"

The senior V.A.D., busy clearing the trolly after the morning round of dressings, came over unsuspectingly to Smith's bedside. She was used to these minor interruptions.

"When's that shirt of mine comin' back?"

The voice was ingratiating, but there was an undercurrent with which the nurse was painfully familiar. She was heartily sick of Smith as the owner, or past owner of shirts, though she was fond of him as a patient.

"Smith, if I hear another word about that wretched garment of yours I'll take no more trouble to find one for you. Nineteen times within the last four hours have you pestered me about that old shirt. For heaven's sake, stop worrying! You can't wear an ordinary shirt till you get that splint off, and that won't be yet awhile. You shouldn't have been such an idiot as to *lend* your kit things. If Robson

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or Thomson, or whatever his name was, managed to lose his belongings, there's no reason why other people should make up the loss."

Smith looked down at his pale pink garment—officially described as a "helpless shirt," and distinguished by its plethora of strings and buttons in odd places—with some complacency. He considered that it "set off" his red hair and freckled skin admirably. With his uninjured left hand he arranged in a careful manner the bow on the right shoulder which appeared a little out of order, and his downward glance was abstracted as he continued his plaint.

"You see it's *this* way, nurse," he went on confidentially. "The wind was up rarely that morning. Robson 'e went out *an'* Nurse Carter was a bit flurried on account of Sister pickin' her up a bit sharp over the kits. I *never* likes to see a lady worried, so I *offers* my shirt to 'elp her out of an 'ole."

His manner was magnificent and the senior V.A.D. suppressed a smile.

"An', as you might say, Nurse Carter 'adn't your reesource in a manner of speaking. *I* know you'd wangle me one some'ow if there's

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one to be wangled, but you see *you* might be shifted, or *I* might be shifted, or we might 'ave a kit inspection."

"Or there might be an earthquake," the senior V.A.D. retorted. "I warn you, Smith, if I hear much more on the subject of lost property—I'm sick of the word 'shirt'—I'll wash my hands of you altogether."

"Now don't you get ratty," Smith said soothingly. "If it 'ad been anything else—a necktie now or a pair o' socks—but it's a bit difficult like to make a shirt out of *nothing*."

But the senior V.A.D. had fled back to her trolly, and the rest of Smith's remarks were made to empty air.

The day was hot and sunny. The senior V.A.D. was also hot but not sunny. The staff nurse was away for the day, the morning's work had been heavy and the task of shepherding a new and very raw junior was hers. At present the new-comer was innocuously employed in putting the ward straight, her small face wearing a rather bewildered expression.

Many things puzzled her in this hurly-burly into which she had been thrust, after a brief

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and unexciting term of work in a convalescent hospital.

She was extremely scared of the Caped Deities and scarcely less of the senior V.A.D. now working off steam on the inanimate enamel objects on the trolly, and she went forward very nervously when the elder girl called her to help scrub macintoshes in the bathroom.

"There you are, nurse! All these small dressing macintoshes go back on the trolly when you've finished and the towels go to be boiled. We generally wash them out first. When are you off to-day?"

The small person looked up meekly.

"Sister said to-night, nurse, but I won't go if you'd rather I didn't."

"My dear child, it isn't what I think. If Sister told you to go off to-night, of course you'll have to. So you'll be on alone this afternoon. Well, you can scrub out all the lockers—they have to be done once a week. Get the men to move their things out, but you'd better put them back or else they'll never get them tidy and Sister's dead nuts on tidy lockers. Oh, and you might look in *all* the bed patients' kits and see if anyone

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has a spare shirt lurking there. And rummage under their pillows too. They're devils for collecting," she added genially.

Little Nurse Brown looked mildly shocked, but she was so grateful for the definite task assigned to her that she inwardly forgave the offender—who was blissfully unconscious of there being anything to forgive. As a rule, she spent her unemployed moments in a state of panic lest some terrible or embarrassing task should suddenly be hurled on her unhappy head, but locker scrubbing came well within the scope of her comprehension, and she was correspondingly happy. The senior V.A.D. looked at her watch.

"I'll just slip down and ask Sister if I can go for the weekly washing now. You can get on with those. Where did I put that laundry book?" She looked round the ward making mental calculations. "We're full our side—that will be thirty-five of everything, and I think they're nearly full the other. I'd better get seventy all round—there *might* be a chance of wangling that blessed shirt. Elliot," she called to a tall boy sitting by Smith's bed, "fetch the stretcher and trolly along to the

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lift, will you? I'm going for the weekly wash."

Elliot disappeared liftwards with alacrity; he liked the position of A.D.C. And the senior V.A.D., disregarding Smith's farewell admonitions as she walked out of the ward, went along to Sister's little office and tapped at the door.

"I've finished in the ward, sister. Will it be all right if I go down for the weekly laundry? They promised it to me this morning, and I'm afraid of losing our turn.

"Yes, nurse. Don't be too long, but if you can't get back before the dinners are up I'll send Nurse Evans to help your side. Try and get those counterpanes they owe us, will you?"

Sister turned to her papers again, and the senior V.A.D. went out and down the long corridor to the lift where Elliot awaited her.

The trolly squeaked and grunted along the narrow passages leading to the section of the hospital sacred to stores and storekeepers. There was generally a good deal of bustle and hurry round the steward's stores and the cook-house, and Elliot who liked a

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little "life," as he put it, was always ready to dance attendance on these small excursions. The linen stores and clothing stores were reached by a long flight of stone steps, and nurses and patients were hurrying up and down these with bundles and neatly folded piles of linen.

"Looks like a butter queue," Elliot said, as he peered round the corner into the crowded stores. "Sounds a bit ratty this morning, the sergeant, don't 'e ?"

The senior V.A.D. shrugged her shoulders.

"Then it's all up with our chances," she said gloomily. "What's the use of putting the man in a bad temper—it doesn't do any *good*, and when your only chance of clean things hang on *him*——" Her silence was eloquent.

"And if we miss it to-day," she began as a fresh thought struck her, "it's good-bye to clean shirts for you boys for this week—he'll never let us alter our day."

Elliot looked meditative.

"I've turned mine once already," he said with equal gloom. "An' as far as I can judge there's nothing left but to turn it again. This is a washout of a place—why, at Rouen

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we could 'ave clean shirts twice a day if we wanted them."

"You're nearly as bad over Rouen as Smith is over that shirt of his," the senior V.A.D. snapped. "It's Rouen, Rouen, from morning to night, and I expect when you *were* there it was, 'If I could only get to Blighty.' I know your little ways. Anyhow you're an old hand and you've got to help me scrounge a shirt *somehow*—it's stocktaking to-morrow."

"He shouldn't ha' bin such an ass as ter *loan* it." Elliot's tone was contemptuous. "They'll know 'e 'ad a shirt in 'is kit, an' they'll know 'e can't ha' *ate* it."

"The blessed things are easy enough to lose," the senior V.A.D. said regretfully as they moved nearer the door—the crowd was thinning a little. "It's the getting them back. 'Tisn't like old times nowadays—you've got to account for every rag."

Elliot cocked a wise eye.

"Don't you worry," he said comfortingly. "There's ways an' ways. You shall 'ave your shirt, sister. Don't let it bother you that much." His gaze travelled round the shelves, which, stretching from floor to ceiling,

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were stacked with neat piles of garments and bed linen. "Pity them shelves with the shirts on isn't a bit nearer the door," he said in an undertone.

The senior V.A.D. shook her head as in duty bound; but it is to be feared that her regrets were more poignant than her scruples.

Certainly her career up to the present, though markedly successful as Wangler-in-Chief to the wards in which she worked—her men being wont to swear by her ability to conjure up those things for which the other wards languished in vain—had been fairly honest; remarkably honest as hospitals go.

And this even though stores of every description were regarded as fair game by the nursing staff, the two bodies being in a constant though friendly state of warfare.

Yet, though the senior V.A.D. of D 17 was undoubtedly "on the spot," she had hitherto dealt justly with the stores, and the stores in return dealt fairly by her, even in such matters as "buckshee" eggs, loaves of bread, gramophone records, and counterpanes—all regarded as being as difficult to wring from their economical custodians as blood from the proverbial stone.

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To-day, however, as she listened with the enthralled Elliot to the heated argument now being carried on between the sergeant in charge of the linen stores and the last of the waiting crowd of nurses, her mind was engaged not altogether virtuously.

The discussion waxed hotter. Accusations of the "palming off" on unsuspecting linen clerks of such illicit articles as sleeping jackets, deceptively grey, in lieu of shirts; of Red Cross pillow slips, gift articles adorned with strings and a red cotton cross—very easily removed—to distinguish them from their buttoned brethren, for hospital issue ones; red ties torn in half to simulate whole scarfs—were hurled from the stores side of the counter.

And against the stores came retaliations and dark insinuations: of incomplete kits sent up by them for fresh convoys; of supposed pairs of socks, the pair consisting in reality of one sock only, neatly rolled upon itself; of the loading of simple patients with pyjama coats where whole suits might have been looked for. The storm raged and the senior V.A.D. sat on the counter and bided her time.

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At last the indignant one departed and the sergeant wiping a heated brow lit a cigarette. His expression was that of mild despair and the senior V.A.D., watching lynx-eyed, opened fire.

"I thought we should have to wait all day," she said sympathetically. "You must be tired of this procession, sergeant—it's really too bad when you're so shorthanded. Are *all* your people away?"

"Miss Harris and Miss James went Saturday, and I've had the bulk of the work to do myself this week. 'Tisn't that the new girls aren't willing, but they don't know the rules yet. And some of the nurses think they can come in any time. Times I've told Nurse Potter Tuesday's the day for H Block, but she thinks I'm going to upset the whole time-table for her. She's wrong—I'm not."

"Well, it would be hardly fair on the other wards who *do* try to come to time. But, you know, I daresay it wasn't her fault—they're very busy up there." The senior V.A.D. looked round the room. "What a *nice* lot of stuff you've got back. I'm sure the new laundry is going to be better than the old one; don't you think so, sergeant?

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The other was a perfect *terror* some weeks and, of course, it all makes double work for you."

The sergeant's expression insensibly mollified.

"Well, they sent us a fair load in yesterday, but they're terrible slow. You wouldn't believe the trouble I have to keep the wards supplied."

"Ah, but if you work with method you can always keep straight—that's what I always say—but some of the people don't seem to realize it."

Elliot shifted from one foot to the other, but the V.A.D. giving him a warning glance continued her soothing syrup.

"All the same you won't be sorry to see them all back. It's nice to get people who really understand the running of a department—it isn't half so much worry for the Heads then. You should be due for leave soon surely, sergeant? It seems a long time since you were away before."

This was enough. The guardian of the linen stores held strong views on the inadequacy of the present leave system, and as he expounded his views the senior V.A.D.

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listened as one enthralled; and not till he came to the end of his recital—and, incidentally, his breath—did she tear out in an abstracted manner the dated leaf of her laundry book.

"Exactly, sergeant, that's just what I feel about it; and if I can I'd like to straighten up all my books before you go. Can you let me have these things to-day?"

Her tones were dulcet. The sergeant winced a little as he saw the totals, but he thought he might be able "to manage it"; and Elliot toiled up and down the steps with load after load till the full total was reached, and the senior V.A.D., who had filled up the time of waiting by discussing the plans of Marshal Foch with the sergeant—an enthusiastic strategist in his spare time—opened the smaller book she carried.

"And I may as well take the owing things as I've got the stretcher—then we shall be quite straight."

So a pile of spotless counterpanes and a heap of bath towels were added to the groaning stretcher load.

The senior V.A.D. smiled sweetly.

"You *are* good to us, sergeant," she said. "The wards should look so nice, and we've

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got a very hardworking set of men in who take such a pride in their brasses and the floors. I suppose you haven't such a thing as an odd piece of flannel—a bit of an old shirt would do—we *never* get enough rags."

"Afraid not, nurse; we have to account for all the old stuff and the torn ones go to the sewing room. There might be just a bit." He rummaged on the shelves. "Is that any use?" as he held aloft a dingy piece of flannel.

"Just what I wanted, sergeant." The senior V.A.D.'s voice was carefully made expressionless, but she clutched at the ragged piece as though it had been fine gold and pelted downstairs to join the waiting Elliot, her trophy carefully hidden in her apron bib.

Up in the ward linen-room, the instant she had a minute to spare, she surveyed her treasures.

"There's a whole sleeve and a neckband and part of a front," she said hopefully to herself, "*and* I've got a tail. Glory be, I think they'll blend. *Also* I haven't tried the pack stores." Her gaze was seraphic as she carefully hid the sections and even Smith's

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efforts—and he laboured hard, the *leit motif* of his conversation being as usual shirts—fell on amiably deaf ears.

During the afternoon little Nurse Brown, slavishly following the directions given in the morning, roused the ire of all her patients by her painstaking search in lockers and beds, but no shirt was forthcoming. True, she unearthed several other contraband articles, but fortunately for their owners she was unaware of the necessity for their removal, and more than one culprit had reason to be grateful for the absence of the lynx-eyed senior V.A.D. from the ward that afternoon.

Sister Bates, the cheery little staff nurse of the ward, came back from her day's holiday in the morning, and mildly chaffed the senior V.A.D. on her unwonted abstraction.

"No, I'm not day-dreaming. If you want to know, sister, I'm thinking out a problem. If you'll come in the linen-room—we've plenty of time, I rushed round particularly this morning—I'll show you what I made last night."

"What is it?" Sister Bates asked. "Something to wear or something to eat?"

"*You* mightn't care to wear it, but I'm

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really rather pleased with myself." And with the proud gesture of a young mother displaying her infant she held up a weird something for inspection.

"But what is it?"

The senior V.A.D. looked pained.

"My *dear* sister, it's a shirt—or rather it will be. You see it only wants another sleeve and a front and it will be perfect. The tail is beautiful," indicating a patch of pale pink flannel about twelve inches square. "In fact, the tail is the foundation—the rest is merely built on. Of course the new part is going to be dipped in red ink to tone with the tail. It will be a real 'square-pushing' affair when I've finished."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Change it of course," the senior V.A.D. returned promptly. "To make up the one we're short in the ward."

"My dear child, you *don't* imagine they'll pass that thing up at the stores. I know Sergeant Harris of old."

"Oh, *he* won't see it. But you can't judge yet—it isn't finished. I thought a little Sanitas——" The artist looked at her work with her head slightly on one side.

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"Let me get down with the laundry early will you, sister? I want to take it down in *two* lots, it's part of the scheme."

The men were singing softly as she went down the ward, Elliot and his chum, a big soft-spoken Australian, behind her, and the burden of their song, chanted in the cheerful tune of "Where is my Wandering Boy Tonight," concerned the shirt of one Smith. It had been composed the evening before by the ward poet and had met with an instant success. But the senior V.A.D. only looked on them with a tolerant smile as she passed by. She was quite indifferent to their gibes even with the remainder of the shirt yet to find, and the shadow of stocktaking—Matron and a watchful and suspicious lieutenant-quartermaster being the principal actors in the drama—hanging over the ward that afternoon.

As they reached the foot of the stairs, the senior V.A.D. checked the laden trolly.

"That's all the weekly stuff, Elliot," she said. "Pitch it down the steps into the counting room and I'll just run up to the stores and see whether they'll wait for our 'daily'—I haven't got that ready this morning."

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In a minute she came rather breathlessly down the steps to the two men.

"It's all right," she said, rather inexplicably. "He'll be down in the counting room all the morning, but we'll have to wait five minutes. Watch our things—I have to go to the pack stores."

Elliot and Dyers were deep in confabulation as she disappeared through the doors leading to the dingy pack stores. Dyers nodded an emphatic assent to something Elliot was saying.

"Real little lady that," he affirmed in his curious Sydney-Cockney drawl. "I'll have a go on me own to-day. You'n me'll go on the scrounge, too, an' see if we can't do a bit. Mind that bale o' goods down there." And he, too, vanished on some mysterious errand.

In the pack stores the grizzled old corporal in charge came out of his groves of stained khaki and mud-bespattered haversacks to greet the senior V.A.D.

"Good morning, corporal," she said cheerily. "As you never come and look your old ward up, I thought I'd come and see you. How is it you never come to see us these days? You ought to have a look at the floor of D 17

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—that was always *your* special job—but we've got a nice lot of boys in now and they're keeping up the reputation of the ward."

"Ay, we'd some good lads in when I was in dock there." The corporal shook his head sagely. "Anything I can get you, nurse? I've some nice bits of stuff as'd make good covers for the dummies—cleanish too."

"Well now, that's splendid—just what I was wanting. Bits of old flannel, or anything soft, they're the best, you know. I suppose you haven't an old shirt or two."

The V.A.D. had one wary eye on the door. She had no business down here at this time in the morning, and very well she knew it.

"Well, I can't say as I *'ave*. They makes us send all the kit stuff straight back; and these army shirts is too thick." The corporal moved stiffly among his presses, handling the tunics and cardigans and rummaging among the folds of neatly piled singlets. "What about this?"

The senior V.A.D. gasped. It undoubtedly *had* at some time been a shirt, though the greater part had obviously been torn away. She clutched its grimy folds with rapture.

"*Just* the very thing. Now you mustn't

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forget to come and see our floor, corporal. Thank you so much." And she almost fled down the passages to the dark alley opening on the sorting rooms where the steam-pipes made the place feel like a ship's engine house and the black-beetles throve. The sergeant was already there tapping his keys impatiently. She dropped the garment tactfully behind a row of pipes and trusted to luck that no one else would retrieve its grey-green preciousness.

Elliot stood close behind her as she and the sergeant counted out the sheets and shirts, towels and pillow-slips, throwing the checked things on to the huge piles which already strewed the floor of the counting room.

"All correct, nurse. I wish all the wards were as careful." The sergeant crossed off the figures in his book.

"Will you be able to take our 'daily'—oh, I forgot, you told me you would be down here all the morning. If I bring it upstairs in half an hour will they take it for me?"

"Oh, that will be all right, nurse; as long as we have it before eleven." And the sergeant, as he politely held the door open for the senior V.A.D. to pass out, nearly went

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headlong over Elliot's bent form as he adjusted a refractory bootlace.

"Elliot, get up from that damp floor. The very idea—with your knee as it is."

Elliot rose, his face flushed but his expression imperturbable as ever.

"Hurts when I bend much, nurse," he said suavely. "Kneeling comes easier." And meekly followed at her heels.

The senior V.A.D. dawdled behind to pet the linen stores' kitten which had strayed down after the sergeant, and deftly tucking the flannel atrocity under her apron rejoined the others.

On the way up they met Dyers, who exchanged an interrogative glance with Elliot, and the two for no known reason lagged behind in fits of laughter, while the indignant V.A.D. pushed the empty trolly alone.

Back in the ward, she vanished into the bathroom and presently called Sister Bates in for judgment, who promptly collapsed in a chair and laughed till she cried. Together they bent over the composite garment which had been hastily stitched together till it did indeed vaguely resemble a shirt—a nightmare of a shirt but still a shirt.

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"What in the world are you going to do next?"

"Dye it," was the prompt reply. The senior V.A.D. was artistic in these matters and regretted the application of the red ink, which had blended well enough with the tail or foundation but refused to amalgamate with the new portion, which was of a neutral tint. "It's like putting the new wine into old bottles—if I'd only had the sense to *wait*. Now it'll have to be coffee and I *think* a little Sanitas."

After a busy interval:

"It's coming." Sister's voice was weak with laughter. "Was there *ever* such a shirt? Hang it on the pipes to dry or they'll spot it at once."

The V.A.D. hung enraptured over it.

"The tail is beautiful," she sobbed. "It's like a mosaic where the red ink shows through! There's nothing for it but dipping it into Jeyes'—that gives a rich and fruity tint—and we can tell them he's infectious, or that he's been sick over it." And grabbing the big bottle of Jeyes' which stood behind the bath she poured half of it into the basin and pushed the coat of many colours into it bodily.

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A little later, with a neat bundle over her arm, she went unobtrusively to the linen stores.

"I've brought our 'daily,'" she said in her pleasant way to the girl behind the counter. "Oh no—it's quite a small bundle. The sergeant took our big washing downstairs, so there won't be very much. Shall I call them out to you? Yes? Four towels." She ticked them off in the book in a businesslike way. "Three pillow-slips, four pairs of socks, two tablecloths, five tea towels, nine handkerchiefs and one shirt. Oh, don't—*I'll* give you the shirt. It's so horribly wet—we've had to put it through disinfectant. But you needn't mind—it's quite all right now. Mind your sleeve—this stuff stains so horribly." And with a gingerly touch the senior V.A.D. cast the Sanitas-reeking garment from her on to the pile under the counter.

The girl in the linen stores unsuspectingly handed out the clean clothing and the senior V.A.D., as she waited for the list to be checked, looked dreamily down at the Joseph's coat as it reposed on the floor.

"How like—yet how unlike," she murmured meditatively; then aloud, "Is that

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our lot? Thank you *so* much," and vanished like a Boojum.

She entered the ward with a bland smile. Smith, seeing the garment over her arm, fell into an attitude of prayer.

"It never is—mine h'eyes can*not* be'old it? That little grey shirt from the West—'ow I love it, an' *'er* as brings it. Bless ye, kind lidy, for yer goodness to a pore lonely soldier," tugging desperately at his ginger forelock.

"Smith, don't be an ass!" The senior V.A.D. laughed. "I told you I'd get it for you and I *have*. Don't ask me how. And don't lose it again—my hair will be grey if I have to—Oh Lord!"

She broke off sharply as Elliot came coyly towards her, a grey garment of reminiscent shape in his hand.

"If I'd *known*, nurse, I wouldn't ha' troubled 'em, but I didn't think you'd ever manage it, so I did a bit of scrounging on my own account."

His smile was ingratiating. The senior V.A.D. sat heavily on the nearest bed.

"It's *awfully* good of you, Elliot, I hadn't

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an idea—Gracious powers on earth! *what's* that?" Her voice rose almost to a shriek.

The big Australian was pushing open the ward door to admit a wheel-chair. Jefferson had been down for X-Ray, but it was neither Jefferson nor his chair nor the sight of Dyers himself which fixed the eyes of the V.A.D. upon the little party—it was the Thing hanging negligently over Dyers' arm.

"Dyers," she gasped amid the cheers of the ward, "what *have* you been doing?"

"Only gettin' a bit of me own property. 'Buckshee' this, sister; dinkum—sure dinkum *and* it's for you." His smile was proud and a trifle proprietary.

It was an open secret in the ward that the big Australian would have moved heaven and earth to get anything for the senior V.A.D.

Smith said never a word but laid urgent hands upon the three garments. His eye was avid.

"I'll be getting up a little shop," he murmured. "Next feller as loses 'is kit'll have ter *buy* the loan of a shirt from me."

The senior V.A.D. struggled with her mirth as the door opened to admit Sister. By some means best known to himself Smith had

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smuggled the three garments under his bed-clothes, and as Sister came in he was reading the leading article in the *Daily Mail* with unction.

Dyers and Elliot turned away with one accord as Sister came nearer. The ward held its breath, the senior V.A.D. mechanically smiled a welcome. Sister's face was genial as she held up a garment—only too painfully familiar—for the senior V.A.D.'s inspection.

"Isn't this *nice*, nurse? I found I had an extra shirt in my linen cupboard. So now we shall be finely fixed for the inspection. Would you like to put it in your linen-room?"

The senior V.A.D. responded suitably. There was a respectful pause till Sister had vanished down the corridor, then the ward let itself go—thoroughly.

The senior V.A.D. was heard to quote the Old Testament at intervals for the rest of the day with special reference to one Joseph. Also, sad to relate, there was a good deal of faint praise abroad.

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THE NIGHT ROUND

OUTSIDE the wind blew chilly, whirling round the tin huts which made up a portion of the big hospital, and whistling drearily through the stone corridors of the main building.

In the tiny office of B4, the V.A.D. in charge of the ward knelt before the grate in a vain endeavour to coax the smoky flame into a cheerful blaze.

The grate was renowned throughout the hospital for its peculiar power of reducing even the best tempered among the staff to a state of acute irritability within five minutes, more particularly when the wind was in the east; and its behaviour this night was typical to a degree.

At irregular, but not infrequent intervals the wind would veer round suddenly, and puffs of smoke drift invitingly down the chimney, accompanied by a shower of black smuts which enveloped everything in the room with a mantle of mourning, not omitting

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the cap and apron of the girl kneeling before the fire.

A knock at the door caused her to raise an annoyed face from her task.

"Oh, *come* in," she said irritably; but her face assumed a more amiable expression as she caught sight of the intruder. "Oh, it's you, Jennifer," she said in a friendly tone. "What are *you* doing in my dug-out at this time of night? Sorry I snapped at you, but just look at this mess! Wouldn't even Angel Kate swear if she had this to cope with every windy night; and the one orderly who can make this fire burn properly taken from here, and sent to relieve on another block."

The night extra laughed as she lowered herself cautiously into a battered arm-chair which stood near.

"Well, it *does* look a pretty average mess; and, if I *may* say so, I've seen *you* look—well, a trifle fresher."

The V.A.D. on the hearthrug lifted grimy hands and apostrophized high heaven.

"Fresher!" she ejaculated. "I should just think so! Here am I as poor as a church mouse and absolutely ruining myself in

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laundry bills. How some of these women actually save on night duty, as they say they do, baffles me—I'm like ink after I've been in this office five minutes. And the day people never think of leaving me any coal. You should have heard Captain Russell on the subject on Sunday night, when he came round and found me struggling with two sticks and a charred cinder. He nearly slew the ward master—but I got my coal.

"Haven't you an orderly?" The night extra's voice stiffened a little—clearly she did not approve of orderly medical officers who interested themselves too personally in the junior staff.

The V.A.D. before the fire suppressed a smile, then she looked up, her tired eyes quizzical.

"There are times, do you know, Jennifer, when I think you'd make an *awfully* good sister," she said cryptically; and declined to explain further. There was a little silence. The night extra continued to toast her rather large feet on the fender, and the V.A.D. of the ward resumed her struggles with the fire. "And you've never yet told me what you're doing here?"

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"Oh, well, I'm night extra for a week or two. It's this way: Sister told Matron she ought to give me a light job after the time I've had specialing Bates, and Sister Thorp doesn't really need me now he's so much better. On the whole I'm not sorry. It's a bit of a change being night runner, though of course one feels a trifle homeless without a ward of one's own; and I wouldn't like to do it for too long. I'm doing the bed list first to-night, and with care I reckon that ought to last me a couple of hours. After that *nous verrons*."

Margaret Davidson laughed.

"It's well to be some people, Jennifer. I wouldn't mind saying good-bye to B 4 to-morrow if it weren't that I've got the dearest lot of boys in just now. We're fairly light for a wonder too, and if only the convoys hold off for a few more nights till I change over I shall be thankful. It's really an odd thing—when I'm on night we get all the convoy work, and the moment I go back on days they begin rolling up in the afternoon. Hope I change over next week; I've heard nothing about it so far, and I'm dead dog tired."

Jennifer was rustling papers.

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"Just read your list out for me, will you, Davey?" She compared her own hieroglyphics with those of the previous night, knitting her brows over the totals.

Margaret picked up the big report book that lay on the table and glanced down its pages.

"Admissions one, discharges seven," she read. "Total number of patients forty-one. Empty beds, nine. All square with last night, Jennifer?"

"Yes, you're all correct. Any beds unavailable?" The night extra's tone was ultra-professional.

"Two. I can't put anyone in that side ward till we're quite certain about Bonn."

"*Sure* your numbers are right? I've had a fearful bother in A block squaring their totals. It's amazing how careless some people are; they don't think of the fag of racing round a thousand beds twice or three times a night, just to pick up some one else's blunders."

"Oh, I think you'll find mine all right. You see I know my men, and we don't get the changes here that they do on a medical block. Must you go, Jennifer?" This as

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the night extra picked up her papers and made her leisurely way towards the door.

"Sorry, old thing, but I must get on. If I have a chance, I'll look you up in the morning. Good night, Davidson."

"Good night." Margaret closed the outer door with a little shiver and pulled her jersey on over her uniform, for the corridors felt very chilly. She was horribly tired; not with that wholesome weariness which promises healthful sleep after a night of work, but tired with the sick exhaustion that makes refreshing rest a hopeless mirage. A long term of night duty had blanched her cheeks and painted dark circles round her heavy eyes. Every day found life more of an effort, and this though her men found her smiling and cheery as ever, and her co-workers noticed no change in her uniformly pleasant and courteous manner. Margaret's working code did not, however, admit of moods in the wards, and her moments of depression and weariness were kept for the hours when she sat alone in her little office, or vainly courted sleep in the tiny cubicle over at the Sisters' Quarters.

To-night as she surveyed herself in the

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mirror over the chimney-piece she made a little grimace at her own reflection.

"You're getting a haggard old woman, my dear," she said critically to the white face which gazed back at her. "Better go round the ward and see what's happening or you'll be nodding like an old cab-horse over his nose-bag. Talking of nose-bags, by the way, I wonder what luxuries they've put up for us to-night."

Appetites are apt to flag on night duty, and Margaret's investigation of the rations supplied to her revealing only the toothsome kipper—a bi-weekly item on the "Night Birds'" menu—she gave a little shudder of dislike and pushed the dish away.

"I really think I feel less inclined for 'Sea Scouts' than usual to-night." She sighed. "Orderly! here, take this creature away. You can cook it for your supper if you like; and there are some potatoes." The gift was received with enthusiasm—inexplicable save to those who have endeavoured to still the cravings of a naturally keen appetite on the allowance deemed sufficient for them by a small-souled quartermaster. Margaret followed the orderly into

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the ward kitchen. "And, Williams," she added, "don't go to sleep in that big chair. Remember the M.O. hasn't done his round yet, and there'll be trouble if he sees a ward arm-chair in here. Take it out, there's a good boy, and sit on a hard chair till he's been round—you'll keep awake better." And with an admonitory nod she walked into the long ward.

All was quiet there. On some of the lockers a shaded lamp glowed, but as Margaret walked up and down between the long avenue of beds their occupants were wrapped in peaceful slumber. Here and there some restless soul tossed and turned, and one boy moaned a little in his sleep, but though Margaret paused by each bed the silence of the ward was unbroken, and with a little sigh of satisfaction she completed her round and stood by the last red light.

The face on the pillow under the glow of the electric standard, save for the deep lines which pain had carved around the mouth, was that of a very tired child. Yet the boy who lay there, one hand under his thin cheek, might wear the Mons ribbon on his tunic and two gold stripes upon his left sleeve. He had

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packed more of suffering and experience into his young life than many civilians of thrice his years, and Margaret's face was very tender as she bent over him.

"If only they can save that leg of yours, laddie," she said under her breath. "I can't bear to think that you may have to lose it after all you've gone through. Such a little brick too! They give us all points, bless them. He should sleep to-night, if only they don't switch *all* the lights on every time they come through. Sister can't realize how little he sleeps, nor how lightly, but then she doesn't know him yet as Sister Crewe and I do. I don't *quite* like his look to-night somehow—he looks a bit pinched." Her brows contracted into a little frown, and very deftly slipping her hand under the clothes she felt for his pulse. "Fairly strong, steady too, that should be all right." Yet she did not appear quite satisfied and, gently drawing the blankets away from the cradle which guarded the injured limb, she looked carefully at the dressing. "That seems all right. I wonder what's the matter with me to-night? I must be getting horribly nervy; but somehow I can't help worrying over this boy."

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And with a little shrug of her shoulders, as though she would shake off some burden, she stood looking down at the sleeper, her hands clasped loosely before her.

These boys of hers were very dear to Margaret's heart; dearer than ever since, her own cup of happiness spilt on the blood-stained plains of Flanders, her sorrow had drawn all suffering humanity within the warm clasp of her arms. That wider love still remained to her, finding expression in her work, and often in the busy life of the ward she could cheat herself for a moment into the belief that the affection of these laughing boys, to whom she was "Sister" indeed in spirit, completely filled that emptiness of heart of which she was at times so pitifully conscious.

But at night-time, as she sat alone, listening to the relentless ticking of the clock as it marked the weary hours of her vigil, she trod in spirit the *Via Crucis* so many women's feet have pressed, since war, with all that it means to womanhood, first came to us.

The sleeper stirred uneasily, his face contracting in a little spasm of pain. Margaret bent over him again as he opened his eyes.

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"Oh, it's *you*, sister." The voice was sleepily contented.

Neither Margaret's admonitions nor the rebuke of the Caped Deities could prevent Gunner Ford from styling every nurse within his ken, down to the very newest "pro." who ever entered his ward, "Sister"—an offence dire indeed against the etiquette of hospital.

Being a privileged person—doubtful compensation which follows in the wake of those who have succeeded in being rather more ill than others in the ward—he concealed a good deal of native obstinacy under his charming "ways," and Margaret being his "special nurse" he treated her accordingly.

"Can I have a drink, please, sister?"

"What would you like, Ford? Hot milk—or I believe you'd like some tea better?"

"Any 'buckshee' sugar going?" The voice was ingratiating.

"Well, there might be a little. Wait five minutes and you shall have some. Leg quite comfy?"

"Oh, it 'urts off and on but nothing worse than usual. It'll be all right when I've 'ad my 'Chai'." Margaret moved away from his bed, the boy's eyes following her till she

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was out of the ward. "Little bit of all right *she* is," he said to himself contentedly, and settled himself more comfortably on his pillows till the promised tea came along.

In the ward kitchen, the orderly formerly holding sway there was putting the fear of God into his successor. He stopped abruptly in the middle of some somewhat pungent remarks, concerning the habits of the said orderly, as Margaret came in.

"Why, *Jones!*" she said. "This is a surprise. It is nice to see you back again. Surely they haven't changed their minds and sent you back again?"

"Afraid there's no such luck, nurse." Jones's voice was regretful. "'Appening to pass this way I thought I'd slip in an' see if you was comfortable. An' it's lucky I did," with a withering glance at Williams. "You'll find the office as it *should* be now, I think"—this with some emphasis—"an' your coffee's made an' waiting for you till the major's done his round. 'E's just along the corridor with Sister, so I'd best be going."

"Oh, Jones, you *are* a good sort," Margaret said gratefully as she saw the bright fire burning in the dreary little office, a tray laid

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with masculine ideas of a "neat set out" and a pot of fragrant coffee steaming on the kitchen stove.

As the sound of voices came along the corridor, Jones moved quietly out of the kitchen, a large milk jug held conspicuously aloft; and Night Sister, whose eagle eye was ever watchful for orderlies straying from the paths of righteousness, saw no flaw in his demeanour, and smiled benignantly upon his meek salute.

The kettle was boiling on the stove and the tea quickly made. Margaret carried it up the ward to the smiling Ford.

"Drink that now, son," she said, "and when the major's been round you can settle down. There's two lumps of sugar in it."

Ford smacked his lips approvingly.

"You can't 'arf make tea," he said. "Reel sergeant-majors' tea that, good an' strong. Hello! Here's Night Sister an' my old man."

Margaret looked up as the lights were flashed on and Sister and the O.M.O. walked up the ward.

The tall khaki-clad figure by Sister's side was unobtrusively aware of the slim form in blue and white which stood sedately by

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Ford's bedside, but Margaret's eyes were only for the boy, who smiled a welcome to his favourite doctor.

"Better to-night, old chap?" The M.O.'s hands were deep in his pockets—a sad trick of his at all times—and he lounged by the foot of the bed, but his eyes were alert and keen. "Leg all right? Any pain?"

"Hurts a bit, sir, but nothin' to speak of."

"Would you like to see it?" Sister's hand was on the counterpane.

"No, no; we won't disturb it if the dressing isn't through."

"Have you looked at it lately, nurse?" Sister spoke.

"About half an hour ago, sister. It was quite all right then."

Margaret's tone was strictly professional, but the little worried pucker between her brows did not escape the major's apparently casual glance.

"Give me your hand, boy."

Ford extended a thin paw for the grasp of the strong brown fingers held out to him.

"H'm! steady enough. He'll be all right, sister. Anything else you'd like me to look at?"

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"No, they're all right in here. Perhaps you will come along to D Block with me to see a man?"

Sister and the M.O. went out of the ward.

"Right sort of chap that." Ford's voice was approving. "Don't bark at yer like some of 'em do. What yer lookin' so solemn about ter-night, sister? You're tired, that's what it is. You go and have a lay down; we're all right—those chaps'll never shift all night long and I shall be asleep in two ticks. I'm that drowsy ter-night." Ford snuggled down into his pillows again. Almost as he spoke, his voice trailed off into a murmur and in a minute he was asleep again.

Yet Margaret did not leave him. For no reason in particular she was anxious about the boy and singularly reluctant to leave him. She was still standing by him when Major Wallace lounged into the ward again, his quiet step scarcely sounding, and it was with a little start that she looked up and saw him at the opposite side of the bed.

"Still mounting guard over your infant?" His tone was amused but kindly and the blue eyes under the glow of the lamp showed something in their usually cold depths which

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only Margaret could bring there. His hair was greying on the temples, though he was still a young man; and to-night his mouth had a kinder expression than its wont.

Margaret liked him, mainly because he was so good to the men, but of late she had been conscious that his unobtrusive presence was apt to be a disturbing element in her thoughts.

"Yes, he seems very comfortable to-night. I can't think why I don't feel happy about him." Her tone was apologetic. She was used to being told that she fussed too much over her men.

"I thought you were worried—that's why I dropped in again. I've seen Sister safely in her office. There's nothing really to bother about, you know—unless he has hæmorrhage—and that of course is always a possibility in a case like this. You know what to watch for?"

Margaret assented gravely.

"It was very good of you to come back," she said. "I am always glad when you are O.M.O. I feel that you don't think us ridiculous if we fuss a little. It's natural, I think: you see we haven't the training behind us that the sisters have, and yet very often we

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have great responsibility. I think on that account we always worry more over our cases."

She led the way down the ward and into the office. Major Wallace sat down in the battered arm-chair till she came back from the kitchen, then he put her firmly into it despite her protests.

"You are going to sit there for five minutes and drink some of that very good coffee," he said in his slow way. "I suppose you wouldn't like to offer *me* some before I go to bed—I'm horribly cold after tramping round those miles of corridors."

Margaret's dimples peeped out in spite of herself.

"It would be *quite* as much as my life was worth if you were seen drinking it here," she said with an irrepressible gurgle of amusement, "but I'd be very sorry if you went shivering to your room. Only you'll drink it very quickly and then go, won't you?"

Major Wallace looked thoughtful.

"You don't want me to scald myself, I hope," he said reproachfully. "Anyway, I'm certainly not going till I've had some—I'll take the responsibility if needs be. By

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Jove, this *does* smell good! You have trained your orderlies well."

"Oh, that was Jones's doing. I had him for ten weeks and he looked after me splendidly. But they're all good boys."

The major's eyes twinkled.

"I believe I had the pleasure of speaking to your dear Jones this morning—he was late on parade," he said in professional accents. "Had I known he was buying your coffee, of course——"

Margaret laughed again. Her face relaxed from its hard lines and her eyes looked less sunken. Insensibly the atmosphere of the room felt lighter and cheerier since the coming of this lazy length of humanity. It was horribly against the rules, and Margaret's acute conscience knew it, but it was with unfeigned regret that she said, as her guest put down his cup and lit a cigarette:

"I'm afraid you must go. I hate being inhospitable, but there would be such a row."

The man rose to his feet at once.

"I don't like being turned out of this nice warm room one little bit, but I can see you want me to go. When can I come again for some more of the good Jones's super-

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excellent coffee ? " His voice was laughing. He moved towards the door, but he did not go at once. Instead he stood with his fingers on the handle of the door, looking down at the girl by the chimney-piece. " Are you sleeping well ? " he asked suddenly.

Margaret shook her head.

" I thought not. And since when have you been sleeping badly ? "

" I never sleep well on night duty." Margaret's voice was not quite steady, to her extreme annoyance. " But it's only the last fortnight that it's been so bad. It makes the nights rather difficult."

" I should think so. I can see a big difference in you since last week. Can't you ask to come off ? "

Margaret bit her lip. Her nerves were on edge to-night, and the kindly note of concern in the man's voice was hard to endure. She felt a sudden intense longing to tell him of the torture which every night now was hers, of the sick longing for rest which every dawn was now more unendurable, of the fearful craving for the sleep which was denied her, but the reserve of years is not lightly broken and she only shook her head and said quietly :

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"I cannot ask to come off till I have done my full time. We don't do that—the sisters put in their three months and it is a point of honour with *us* to stay on till we are relieved. I have very little more time now and I think I can stick it out."

Major Wallace looked at her keenly.

"What's the trouble—seeing things?" The question did not sound absurd to either of them.

Margaret's fingers were gripping the chimney-piece but her voice was level.

"No. I hear things all the time—I don't quite know when I am listening to realities or imaginary things. I seem to lose count of time—minutes are hours, and sometimes hours are eternities. Sometimes I get in fearful panics—I think that one of the men has been lying calling for help and that I haven't heard him. You must think me very ridiculous, but at four o'clock in the morning things are often a bit topsy-turvy, aren't they? Please don't think me hysterical—I haven't spoken like this to anyone else. I should be quite all right if we were busier—I know I should—but it's the long hours when one has to sit quite quiet just waiting

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for the morning to come. I feel inclined sometimes to put the clock on—if I didn't feel a brute I should! But really the poor dears grizzle enough as it is these cold dark mornings when they *do* have to get up." She gave a rather forlorn little laugh.

Major Wallace still looked at her rather gravely.

"I think you take your work rather seriously," he said. "Obviously you want a rest—night work takes it out of some people more than others. Anyhow, don't worry over that boy—if you are at all anxious just telephone me and I'll be round in a jiffy. And if I don't answer—and I warn you I sleep soundly—just send your orderly round and tell him to *hammer*."

Margaret looked at him gratefully.

"I think it's very good of you not to scold me," she said. "Most of the people here put one down as nervy if one shows the least anxiety over a patient. I wish I had the technical skill that would make me take things more casually."

The man's eyes twinkled again.

"I'm afraid you'll never attain to that degree of excellence," he said gravely, and

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with a sudden smile and a gay wave of the hand he went out of the office and down the corridor.

Margaret still stood by the chimney-piece, her eyes thoughtful. It was good to talk even for a few moments with some one of one's own caste, who spoke one's own language. It helped to take one's mind off the treadmill of thought and relieved for a while the tension of a very tired brain. One forgot for a little.

She had an absurd desire to follow the M.O. down the corridor and beg him to stay—just for the sake of the sense of human companionship he had brought with him.

There was no chance of any other visitor to her ward. Sister would probably not appear again till at six o'clock she came to take the report, for there were no acute cases in B 4. The night extra had half promised to visit her, and for a little while Margaret sat listening for the sound of the familiar clump along the corridor. But Jennifer did not come, and Margaret cooked and ate her solitary supper, made a few journeys up and down the ward and strove hard to keep her mind away from the inevitable struggle.

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As the small hours of the morning drew on her odd restlessness increased. She knew the symptoms only too well. By every means at her disposal she fought the terror which invaded her mind and strove to keep at bay the oppression which filled it. Half a dozen times she went into the ward and stood by Ford's bedside, her mind filled with the idea that some danger was hanging over the boy. Yet each time she went to him he seemed to sleep peacefully and she railed at her own folly as she returned to her chair and watched the minutes marking themselves off on the face of the clock. Half-past one struck and she moistened her dry lips—God! how long the night was—and wondered how she was to endure the hours that yet remained.

Picking up a book she read desperately for a few minutes only to find herself listening for some sound that never came.

The letters formed a blur before her eyes, and she put the book down very cautiously lest her least movement should break the stillness. At the back of her mind was the knowledge that if she made very much noise Something which was lying in wait would make its pounce. She had been sitting with

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only the firelight for company, for the glare of the electric light made her tired head throb painfully, but now in a sort of panic she went over to the switch-board and flashed the two lights on. Going over to the mirror she saw her face was deathly pale.

Again she went into the ward, and again she looked at the sleeping boy. He was a little paler perhaps—or was it her imagination? Hurriedly she picked up the bed-clothes and examined the leg. "Thank God!" She breathed rather than spoke the words. "Five hours more and the night will be over." And once again she went into the office.

The wind had lulled and the hospital was very still. Over the wards hung the heavy air of sleep.

The very fires burnt drowsily and the quiet grew thicker, enveloping her almost as with a thick blanket, so that the sudden fall of a coal into the grate or the scraping of the orderly's chair in the kitchen close by were startling noises stabbing the silence, causing her heart to beat against her ribs with loud sickening thuds.

The girl sat very still in her arm-chair by

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the fire, every nerve tense, every sense on the alert. Her hands gripped the arms of her chair till the knuckles shone white in the light.

In the kitchen the drowsy orderly was nodding in his chair; in the ward the men did not even stir in their sleep—it seemed that the whole world was sleeping and only she was there alone to watch and listen.

Two o'clock dragged into half-past; the half-hour merged insensibly into three o'clock.

The air was very chill with the creeping cold of an English November and a small rain fell.

Margaret's face was ashen, her vitality was very low in the dead hour before the dawn.

Presently she knew she would crave sleep. She hardly knew which was the worse, this horrible tension of mind and body when every sense was super-active, every muscle crisped as against a pulling weight, or the slow creeping approach of a sick sleep out of which she must drag herself with pains unexplainable.

More by instinct than by reason she forced herself to go into the ward to look once more

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at Ford, and once again she returned to her chair.

The fight was growing harder now.

The muscles of the back of her neck seemed unable to hold up the heavy weight of the head—the nerve centres appeared to have lost their governing power. Surely it was strange, she thought drowsily, that one's head should be so enormous, so difficult to balance. One straightened it so laboriously so many times with a sick jerk that left one weak and trembling; one placed it once more in its proper position, yet it remained oddly inert. Perhaps the mistake was in not holding on to the room—it was slipping a little—that must be it. Yes, the room must be held quite steady, and the chair too. If one's eyelids were not so heavy the iron band would not press into one's head so heavily. They must open better, they must be kept open, wide open or—else—one—would—go—to sleep—to—sleep.

Not three minutes by the clock, but to Margaret as she came back into consciousness with a ghastly jerk, which set every fibre of her body trembling, it was an eternity. She had been buried in some cavernous depth

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from which her sub-conscious self had dragged her with such wrenching torture that her very body agonized. The same force pulled her through the door by no volition of her own and told her what she was to do and where to go. "Ford, Ford," she whispered numbly to herself. "I must go to Ford; he is calling."

There was no sound in the ward as she went to him, but she saw that his eyes were open, his face was very pale.

"I was just goin' to call yer, sister," he said faintly. "I don't feel right some'ow; my leg's kinder funny, I think it's bleedin'. I've only just woke up."

Margaret pulled away the clothes. It was not the reflection of the little lamp that had stained everything a bright red. A ligature had slipped—there was no time to lose.

Something snapped in her brain and with almost an audible click the working mechanism readjusted itself. She was her complete entity again—calm, capable and self-possessed, ready to take prompt action.

"Don't worry, Ford," she said very quietly. "It has only just begun to bleed, evidently; we will soon stop it."

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The orderly was asleep in the kitchen. He would not hear her if she called. The telephone was in the office. It was impossible to leave a pumping artery to satisfy the rules of etiquette. There was a tourniquet on the dressing trolly half-way up the ward, and Margaret's first thoughts were for that.

She left the boy only the few seconds necessary for her flying feet to reach it and adjust it with fingers that did not tremble. The wounds were too high for the tourniquet to do its work quite satisfactorily, and Margaret put her thumb on the artery bringing all the pressure possible to bear on it. Then and not till then did she wake the next sleeper.

"Cooke!" He woke and stared at her for a minute. "Slip your trousers on and race into the kitchen and fetch the orderly. As quickly as you can." Then, "Orderly, fly round to the M.O.'s room and tell him to come immediately to B 4. Say Ford has hæmorrhage. Then telephone to Sister's office and tell her the same thing. But get the M.O. first. If Sister is not in her office find her. As quick as you can." Cooke was by her side waiting for orders. "See that

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there is plenty of boiling water, Cooke; fill up both the small kettles. Pull the trolly up here and put two screens round this bed; not too near—leave room. Get me a big bowl from the trolly and put it down here." Her voice was low and quiet.

For a few minutes—they seemed an eternity—she stood by Ford, every faculty concentrated on her task. Then, with a sigh of relief, she saw the M.O. and Sister coming together up the ward, the man walking with long strides, Sister hurrying by his side.

His quick eyes took in all that she had done, and his voice, though curt, was approving.

"That's all right, you couldn't have wasted much time, nurse. Now we'll carry on." His muscular arms were bare, his shirt-sleeves high above his elbows.

Sister pulled off her cape and rolled her sleeves up. Margaret flew hither and thither, obeying the crisp orders that flew like hail.

Ten minutes' work and the M.O. straightened his back.

"He'll do now," he said. "We'll have him down to the theatre, though, I think, sister, and finish the job right off. I want to save that leg and we can't with another dose

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of this sort of thing—the boy's too weak. Can you have the theatre prepared? I'll give the anæsthetic and then you can assist."

Sister was at her best to-night—alert, capable and far-seeing.

"Sister Hewitt can get the theatre ready. Nurse, run down to C Block and tell her, and let Nurse Jennifer remain in Sister's ward while Sister is in the theatre with me."

Margaret sped away on her message, and before very long Ford was on the stretcher and hoisted carefully along the corridor into the white gleaming theatre.

Margaret waited for him to come back, a deep thankfulness in her heart. She moved quietly about her work, for only a few of her men had wakened, so quickly had the whole affair been over, and as the wheels of the trolly grated along the corridor she went to help Sister put the boy back into his bed. Sister wore a contented smile as she stood watching the unconscious Ford, a hand on his pulse.

"Stood it very well," she said. "Major Wallace is very pleased with him." The little excitement had thawed her professional

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reserve and she spoke to Margaret as one human being to another.

The girl's eyes were full of tears.

"I feel *awful*, sister," she said in her low voice. "I was just dozing in my chair. Certainly it wasn't five minutes since I had last been in to look at his dressing, but I was asleep—I am certain I was—and I thought I heard him call. When I got to him it had begun. I can't bear to think what might have happened."

Sister's expression did not alter.

"My dear child," she said, and her voice was reassuring, "It's perfectly obvious that the hæmorrhage had only just begun, and equally certain that no one could have foretold the moment at which that ligature would slip. If Matron herself had been there the same thing would have happened. I am only too thankful that you kept your head, that was the important thing. If any of us had thought it likely that this would happen the boy would have had a special put on; so don't be ridiculous and hysterical. You did very well. Now go and make us all some tea. Then I'll send Nurse Jennifer in here to do your work and you can sit with Ford."

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Margaret could not trust her voice. She made the tea as one in a dream, then sat by Ford's bedside while the others had their little refreshment. She could hear the tinkling of spoons and the low-toned hum of voices coming from the office. Presently Sister and the major came in and looked at each other across the boy with eyes of satisfaction.

"He'll do," the man said, his hands in the pockets of his theatre coat, as he lounged in his careless way against Cooke's locker. "Sensible little nurse you've got there, sister." His voice was purposely indifferent. "Must have acted jolly promptly. It's a bit of a responsibility for these girls, you know. They haven't got your training and experience to back them up in an emergency like this."

Ford stirred a little.

"Coming round," Sister said. "But of course he didn't have a great deal—Yes, I think Nurse does very well."

His eyes opened sleepily, then closed again.

"Pulse quite fair, isn't it?"

The authorities compared notes.

"I'll go and have a tub and get myself up a bit better." The man laughed. "Not

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worth while going back to bed—it's half-past five now. I hate cat naps. You'll stay with him ? "

Sister nodded assent.

" He'll be all right though, I feel sure, now." Margaret pulled up an arm-chair for her and Sister settled herself placidly behind the screens. " I'll just see him properly round, nurse," she said, " and then I'm going to leave him to you. You can sit here with me ; little Jennifer can do your work as you've had a trying night of it."

So Margaret shared the watch and Jennifer went on with the routine work of the ward.

At seven o'clock Ford opened his eyes again.

" Hello, sister ! " he said feebly with a shadow of his usual grin. " Can I have a drink ? "

" Hello, son ! " Sister's smile was cheery. " All right now ? We'll send Nurse for just a tiny sip of water—only to rinse your mouth out. I don't want you to be sick."

Margaret moved away. Again the boy's eyes followed her.

" Little bit of all right," he said weakly.

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"I'd 'a' bin dead if it 'adn't been for 'er. She come in just when I was goin' to call."

"Don't talk, Ford; you're a fearful old chatterbox." Sister laughed. "You can tell us your reminiscences later on."

But Ford was obstinacy itself in his gentle way and as his eyes closed again he murmured, "Lil' bit of all right," as though to silence some imaginary objection.

Margaret worked on automatically till eight o'clock struck and the day staff came on, but her overwrought brain dwelt still on the happenings of the night.

Suppose—suppose she had not heard the cry which Ford had not uttered?

As she went out of the door to the cloakroom for her big coat the O.M.O. came out of his room.

"Well, aren't you rather pleased with yourself?" he laughed cheerily. "If I were a V.A.D. I should be jolly glad when any of my gang made good. And here you are looking as if you were going to a funeral. Breakfast is obviously what you need, young lady."

They were alone in the corridor, the big

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man and the small girl, her face very pinched and grey in the cold light.

"I was just feeling rather a failure," she confessed. "Suppose I had gone *really* asleep, that boy would have died."

"Well, you wouldn't, you know," he said comfortably. "All night long you thought things were going to happen, and when they *did* you were on the spot. No human being can do more. Don't lose your sense of proportion, Margaret."

The name came naturally to his lips, so naturally that neither of them realized it.

The humanities have a way of surviving even in the starch and red tape of a Military Hospital, and that was how two people took their first steps along a familiar road leading to a garden not unknown to our first forefathers.

But that, as Kipling would say, is another story.

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GOING TO THE PICTURES

THE ward door opened and Sister came in. Her gaze travelled up the long vista of white beds till it reached her satellite—caped but not striped—who was assisting Jones into his dressing-gown preparatory to his afternoon airing in the balcony. A *sotto voce* remark from Jones, and Sister Renton hurriedly abandoning the wrapper sped down to the ward to receive the august commands.

"Oh, Sister Renton, the major has just telephoned up to say he can do Humphries and Andrews in the morning. Have them prepared, will you? I've told the theatre people myself, as it was so late and they had already been round once for the list."

"Yes, sister, certainly; and I suppose you would rather Humphries didn't go to the concert?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter. Have him partly prepared before he goes; the night people can see to the rest. They won't do much

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to-morrow—he's got the worst over." And with her benign smile, which covered extremely acute powers of observation, she glanced down the ward again and made her stately exit. A moment afterwards, however, she opened the door again, cutting short some extremely pungent remarks which Jones was uttering on the subject of hospital wardrobes. "And, sister, you might tell Nurse Vaughan that she is to take the cases down in the morning. I like those senior girls to take their turn in the theatre."

"Yes, sister." The staff nurse made her way up the long sunny ward again, her thin lips rather tightly compressed.

From a bed near the door a cautious head was raised.

"Funny thing the way them two *can't* agree." Cotton, a young Sapper, minus his left leg but in possession of a wealth of high spirits and a pleasing voice, liable to become piercingly falsetto on provocation, held out a Woodbine to the occupant of the next bed.

"Sister Susie's mad along o' the Tank lettin' me go to t'concert," grinned Humphries.

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The Tank, it may be added, was the unofficial designation of that stately lady with the red stripes on her arms who had just pronounced his fate. The Woodbine was accepted, lighted and inhaled with apparent satisfaction. In the middle foreground Jones's voice was upraised in loud argument with Sister Renton.

"At it again. Got the wind up rarely to-day; Jones is in for it this time. Underminin' her authority in the ward, I shouldn't wonder." Cotton's voice was carefully modulated, but his tones were sarcastic.

Humphries looked down the ward. A few beds further along, on the opposite side, a middle-aged man was sitting in rather a despondent attitude on his cot. With the exception of Jones, who could hardly be described as an "up patient" since his activities were very clearly limited by a wheel chair, he was the only occupant of the ward, other than the half-dozen or so of bed patients. The rest of the inhabitants were out in the sunshine of the outer world.

"Old Jock looks a bit down on his luck," Humphries remarked. "Hi there, you Jock, heard the news? You an' me's for the

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pictures to-morrow. 'Bout time I saw a fresh film—haven't been down for more'n a month now."

Private Humphries of the Devons had, in his reminiscent tone, implied some little experience of the "Movies."

"Four times in France *an'* three 'ere," he enlarged reminiscently. "Captain in Rouen used to call me 'The Foundry.' Shouldn't wonder if they kep' me 'ere for duration diggin' bits out. Excavating, *I* calls it."

Jock moved over from the other side of the ward. He was a small man with bright eyes, which just now wore a distinctly worried expression. Operations were new things to him and the atmosphere of casual hilarity which enveloped these mysteries in B 4, where they were of almost daily occurrence, was slightly puzzling. He had only moved in from a neighbouring camp on the previous day and felt himself rather outside in this crowd of light-hearted schoolboys. He cherished a secret adoration for the senior V.A.D., who was a kindly soul, especially in the case of waifs and strays from Labour Battalions who for occult reasons were regarded with less affection by the staff than

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the genuine "convoy case." But Nurse Vaughan was off duty this afternoon and her understudy, Nurse Reed, who was now propelling Jones balcony-wards, did not meet with unqualified approbation from Jock. Frankly he considered her pert and the two were not *en rapport*. This afternoon, therefore, Jock felt somewhat of an Ishmaelite, and it was with a distinct sense of relief that he sat down on the edge of Humphries' bed and prepared to join in the conversation.

"Gie's a lacht," he said briefly, and used to non-comprehension—he was a Glasgow citizen of the deepest dye—pushed his pipe forward.

"Blowed if I 'aven't used my last match." Humphries turned to Cotton. "Got a box, chum?"

Cotton turned to burrow under his many pillows—he was exacting in the matter of "support"—and dived into the mass of small objects which therein dwelt, unearthed only when his bed was made, as, despite his protests, it was twice daily.

"Give us it back," he said. "Only one I've got left. Lady giv' us these on Tuesday. *You* was asleep, Humphries, and snorin'

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awful"—this in aside to Jock—"fair shook the rafters."

Jock smiled broadly, his first smile for anyone but Nurse Vaughan since his entry into the ward. But his interest plainly centred round Humphries.

"What'll they be doin' to ye the morn?" he inquired tersely.

"Bit o' shrapnel out o' my 'ip," with equal brevity. "What's yours—appendix?"

"Ay, that'll be what *she*"—with a nod of his head over in Sister Renton's direction—"ca's it."

Jock's tone expressed apparent doubt as to the correctness of this designation.

"Oh, you'll not be long—they does 'em nearly every week 'ere—just a whiff or two into yer gas mask and yer off."

"Wull I be sick?" asked Jock with interest.

"Some is and some isn't." Thus the oracle. "Some feller comes back noisy an' others sings a bit—I was always a quiet 'un."

"Humphries, here's your bowl. You'd better make haste and wash. I want to get finished before tea. I'm going off at five."

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And the small V.A.D. held forth a tin basin of water.

"I'm gettin' up after tea and going to the concert, but I can wash now if that suits better. Give us the basin." And Humphries proceeded to collect his washing apparatus the while his nurse stood patiently, the bowl in her hands.

"Think I'll get up and go down to the bathroom to wash," said Cotton in a seductive voice, the said process being strictly forbidden.

"Cotton, you'll do nothing of the kind," his five foot nothing tyrant exclaimed, her face very pink. "What would Sister say?"

"*She* wouldn't say nothin'. Come on, nurse, be a sport and fetch us a chair."

Cotton dearly loved to tease small Nurse Reed. She was new to the ward and very earnest, and her days at present were spent in separating the chaff from the grain in the conversation of B 4.

Her face was firm, however, as she held out the tin bowl for Cotton's acceptance; and he, with an upward glance to see whether "leg pulling" was like to meet with further success, decided to reserve his energies for a

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more amusing opportunity. The ward resounded with splashing and the sounds incidental to much careful hairdressing, and presently a row of sleek-headed saints sat up and prepared for a little genial conversation while the routine of "backs" and "beds" was carried through in its entirety, little Nurse Reed going very red and hot over her conscientious toil and the quantity of kindly advice tendered. Five o'clock struck and tea appeared, the clumping of boots along the corridor denoted the return of the "square-pushers," and a cheery voice heralded the approach of the senior V.A.D. She went quickly from bed to bed distributing letters and smiles, and the ward was suddenly a more cheerful place.

"Hello, me old flower," called Tate, an irrepressible Yorkshireman up at the end of the ward. "Any mail for me to-night? What—not a registered postcard? Oh, *you're* 'no bon.'"

"Sorry, Spuddie, but I'm a poor postman to-day—better luck to-morrow. One for you, sergeant. Gunner Danes? Corporal Black? Radford, is your number 240642? Yes? Oh well, this is for you. Anderson? Gone

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out, has he? Oh yes, transferred to the Canadian Hospital. Black, Forrest *and* Stevens. All the rest gone on transfer—these will have to go back to the gate. Had your tea, boys?"

There was a chorus of "Yes" and Nurse moved down the ward again.

"Humphries"—turning to him—"did I hear Sister say you were going down in the morning?"

"Yes, nurse. Jock and me's goin' tomorrow and you're coming with us. Front seats for the movies and you to take us down. Bit o' luck this time. Shockin' lot of films they was last time I went to the pictures."

"It'll be 'Old my 'and, nursie, I'm afraid of the dark.'" This from the not-to-be-suppressed Spuddie.

Nurse Vaughan laughed. Then she saw Jock's solemn face and moved across to him.

"You'll be glad to get it finished with," she said in her confidential way. "You won't be down long, you know, Jock, and I'm coming too. We'll send Humphries first if we can."

"It's no that I'm frichtened, ye ken," Jock said in his slow way. "But I'm hopin'

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they'll no keep me in ma bed sae lang—I'm no sae used till me bed."

"Oh, you won't be in bed long, Jock. You'll just have to be patient a few days and not worry—there's nothing to worry about."

Later in the evening Blair, the nursing orderly of the ward, made his appearance for that preparation which involves and includes such items as castor oil and razors. Blair was a tall and bland individual, excessively C 3 where any kind of manual labour was concerned but good at his own jobs and popular with his patients by reason of extraordinary amiability. His appearance was the signal for a running fire of chaff—sure sign of popularity, since practical jokes and personal chaff are rarely directed to any but the best liked among the staff.

So when Blair, with his clean white overall and immaculately brushed hair, proceeded to fetch screens and place them round Humphries' bed the ward settled down to enjoy itself for ten minutes, and Blair's movements during his afternoon off-duty time were subjected to a searching examination. Blair was suspected of being an inveterate

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"square-pusher," and there were wild speculations on the conversation he was reputed to have held with various members of the fair sex. His wardrobe—alleged to have been purchased solely with a view to capturing the attentions of the maidens of the city in which for the time being his energies were occupied—was analysed in detail, and such items as "square-pushing" tunics, "square-pushing" socks and ties, severely handled by his critics.

Blair worked on undisturbed by the tumult, and after a time dragged his screens over to Jock's bed and resumed his toil there.

The senior V.A.D. was alone in the ward. Sister Renton had left for her evening off duty at 5 o'clock, and the staff nurse in the twin ward of B 4 on the other side of the long corridor rarely came across, unless the girl really required her help.

This was Peggy Vaughan's happy hour, the happiest in a happy day, for the wards were her life and her "boys" filled her every thought. She dearly loved her thirty grown-up babies, their cheerful courage and patient acceptance of pain and monotony; and though in the day-time, when all was bustle

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and tempers were apt to wear thin under the strain of the pace which must be kept up, she might sigh at times for the peace of her garden and the rest of a leisured life, she knew in her heart that here was her true vocation, and these evenings when her little kingdom was all her own were hours of complete happiness.

Her feet might ache as she toiled up and down the ward on countless little errands, but her heart kept young and gay in the happy family atmosphere of the ward, and the trivial annoyances of the daily round were apt to melt under the welcoming smile of some poor lad, too weak to move, as his nurse, "My *own* nurse" as he would proudly claim her, came into the ward after an hour or two of absence.

To-night she clucked over her big brood like a little mother hen, dressing Humphries for his concert and helping him to struggle into his wheeled chair, cheering the disappointed ones whose amusement would have to be found in the ward itself, and fixing Brown's pillows for the hundred and fifth time that day. "No one puts me as comforble as you do," was the invariable "thank

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you" of the ward baby, who had lain for weary months and would have to lie for more still, helpless and yet restless on the water-bed which made movement of him so difficult, be-splintered and bandaged as he was.

"Laddie, what are you and I going to do when Jenkins goes?" Nurse Vaughan said laughingly, as the big Welshman who constituted himself her A.D.C. came to the rescue in lifting the boy higher on his pillows. "We'll have to keep him for the duration, I think. Nobody helps to lift you so easily as he does."

"Dunno what *I'd* have done without him any road," the boy said gratefully. "There isn't many as 'ad been as patient as him—in the night particler."

"Nothing more I can do for you before I go, is there, nurse?" And Jenkins turned away, embarrassed.

"No, thank you, Jenkins. You've been awfully kind. Now run off to the concert—you won't get a good seat if you don't go early."

The senior V.A.D. stood watching his broad back as he departed slowly along the ward, her eyes very tender.

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"Funny, isn't it, Smuts?" she said to her baby who lay looking up with adoring eyes. "There's always somebody like Jenkins in a ward—we never get stranded. Such a lot of these men are so big and look as if they'd hurt anyone if they went to touch them, but they're gentler than we are because they're stronger. I expect you and I will find somebody else even when he has gone—we won't stick fast anyway. Now let me see if your temperature is behaving itself to-night. Then when all the others have gone you shall have your jelly, spoilt old thing that you are."

The last of the concert party filed out and the ward felt very silent. Nurse finished the temperatures and tucked her family in again, then went round the ward putting everything ready for Matron's nightly inspection.

"*What* an untidy family I've got!" she scolded gently. "Regular bad boys the whole crowd of you. Jock, you'll have to set them all a good example by lying still and not wriggling—such a business I have to keep the ward respectable."

Blair, his task completed, had an indus-

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trious and helpful mood on, and together the V.A.D. and he restored the chaotic ward to order: pulled out creases in rumpled sheets where sinful patients had been sitting on their beds—much preferring them to hard chairs—smoothed pillows, cleared locker tops, swept the floor, and did the thousand and one jobs which come as a climax to the day. There is little time in the wards of a big military hospital for much converse with the patients save in the merest snatches; the "pillow-smoothing, hand-holding touch," as one irreverent V.A.D. described it, exists in the written word only. It does not form part of the daily round, for the most obvious reason of all—every one is far too busy. But there is always time for a smile, and though few V.A.D.'s worked harder than Nurse Vaughan her patients counted, and counted without fail, on a cheery word or two as she flew about her work, and a smile and a jest sprang easily to her mouth.

"Better than a bottle of medicine," was the verdict of the ward, and "tonic" was the word that best described her.

Morning found the usual bustle, and the senior V.A.D. and her junior colleague found

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themselves in a whirlwind of Sister Renton's activities.

"Wind up official" was the ward's opinion on that morning's mood, and Sister's subordinates found themselves the centre of a small cyclone.

"I wish the major wouldn't do operations on Sunday morning," said Vaughan *sotto voce* to her junior, the red-headed Smith. "Miss Renton *does* get the wind up so horribly on these occasions. For goodness' sake, Smith, do dust under those ledges; there'll be a fearful shindy if she catches you skimming over the top. Ask little Hedges to dust the other side for you; he'll do it like a shot if you ask him."

"Nurse Vaughan, fetch the iodine down here and some wool. And do make haste; one might think we had all the morning before us instead of having to send those two cases down first."

"Coming, sister." And Vaughan thrust a duster into Hedges' hands, raced off to the bathroom to wash her own hands and returned rapidly to her irate superior with the necessary articles.

"I can't imagine why Sister wants to send

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you down to the theatre with these cases; now I'm going to be left with all the dressings and it's Nurse Reed's morning off duty. Just look at the ward, not finished yet and nearly half-past eight. Everybody's late this morning." Thus Sister Renton.

The senior V.A.D. was discreetly silent. There are occasions when a soft answer will turn away wrath, but this was a case which clearly demanded a judicious effacement of the Red Cross element in the ward. Sister's orders were final, and since she was ordered to the theatre she would go; but with a whimsical shrug of the shoulders at her usual fate of buffer between the Caped and the Striped power, usually antagonistic, she moved unobtrusively away from the danger zone and busied herself with the final touches to the ward. Up in the linen-room reposed the spotless operation sheets and long white woolly stockings destined to transform Humphries into a kind of seraphic choir boy, and with these on her arm she presently returned. As she tied the strings down his back and helped him to wriggle his toes into the white woolliness a hoarse whisper echoed in her ear:

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"Don't take no notice of 'er this morning —she's reg'lar upset. 'Er young man's just wrote to say 'e's took up with a W.A.A.C."

"Be quiet, Humphries," in a guarded voice. "Don't make matters worse; remember I've got the rest of the morning to work out."

"Oh, *that's* all right," said Humphries, but in a lower tone. "*She* can't 'ear me—too busy scaring the life out of old Jock, *she* is. When am I going down?"

"They haven't sent a message up yet, but you're all ready. I must fly and put my clean apron on. Don't wriggle your dressing off; it isn't too tight now."

Humphries nodded and fell to watching the door. A bump heralded the approach of the white trolly, watched by Jock with the expression of one assisting at an execution.

"What ho, she bumps!" exclaimed Humphries. "Young fellow me lad"—this to the white-robed Blair who was pushing the trolly up the ward with more zeal than discretion—"if you don't move that push-cart a bit more steady like when I'm on it, you and me's goin' to 'ave words afterwards."

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"Fetch the theatre blanket, Nurse Vaughan. Nurse *Vaughan*, what *are* you doing ?"

"Coming, sister," came a muffled voice—thickened by pins—from the linen-room and the senior V.A.D., resplendent in an immaculate apron crackling with starch, fled down the ward as rapidly as she dared, with a low-toned chorus of "lef', right, lef'" marking each step, and hastened to place the blankets on the stretcher before it was lowered to the level of Humphries' bed.

Rapidly and skilfully he was placed thereon, his pillow adjusted and his blankets tucked round.

"Now we're off," said the patient, as he folded his hands on his breast in a pathetic attitude, destined to melt the heart of the pretty "charlady" then operating on the corridor. "Only want the fam'ly 'ound and I'd be nearly as pretty as them crusadin' chaps on the monniments. Push off, nursie." And with a farewell wave of the hand to the admiring listeners the precious bundle on the trolly was wheeled theatrewards.

"Humphries, you're madder than usual this morning," laughed the senior V.A.D.

"'Ad to do something to keep old Jock's

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spirits up. My word, don't he look something awful in that white nightie? Might 'a' dropped a shillin' and found five pound."

Humphries' loquacities ended only at the theatre door, where he became dramatic and with his finger on his lip proclaimed silence befitting, as he said, so solemn an occasion. With the indifference of one a little blasé by all this publicity he accepted the mask and the kindly admonitions on the subject of deep breathing, tendered to him by the doctor who was acting as anæsthetist, and with ease and rapidity Humphries sank into the merciful sleep of modern surgery.

The senior V.A.D. stood a little in the background, alert to catch the low-spoken words which came at intervals from the white-robed masked figures whose kingdom this white-tiled shining glittering room was. She might be needed to fetch and carry, to approach things which those gloved fingers might not touch, or to act as messenger between the theatre and the surgeons' room. But it was not many minutes before she was helping Blair to wheel that quietly sleeping form up the long corridor, and even to Jock who watched the reappearance of the trolly

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and its burden—very silent now—it seemed a short waiting time before he was placed on the stretcher and turned for a last look at Humphries, breathing like a child in his pillowless bed.

"Now, Jock, we'll soon be back and there's nothing to dread, you know," said a cheery voice to the rather silent bundle on the trolly.

"Ye'll no be leavin' me doon there?" came the anxious query. "I'll no be mindin' if ye'll stay wi' me."

"I shall be there all the time, don't you worry, and Blair too. All you've got to do is just to take one deep breath when they give you the rather nice little silver cup thing that fits over your mouth and in a jiffy you'll be sound asleep. When you wake up again you'll be back in your own bed and you and Humphries can have a crack with each other."

Jock did not reply till they reached the theatre door; then he turned his bright eyes on the senior V.A.D.'s face and in a very low voice he said:

"Ye've been a kind bit lassie. God bless ye. There's some turrible harrd, but I'll no forget ye."

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The senior V.A.D. patted his shoulder with her comforting unsentimental touch.

"Now *that*'ll be all right, Jock," she said. "Don't forget what I told you and remember there's nothing to worry about. Blair, mind that corner, you'll be having us into it in a minute."

In the theatre Jock developed symptoms of obstinacy and refused to proceed further unless he were allowed to retain possession of his nurse's hand, and it was in that position only that he consented to permit the impatient surgeons to put him into his sleep. He took the anæsthetic badly and there was a good deal of kicking and spluttering before he finally subsided into that mysterious region where life is, yet appears remote, where the active struggling personality is transformed into a subject for treatment—a "case," in short.

Herein lies the very simple explanation of the interest of the theatre and of its lack of horrors even to the novice. It is far more trying to the onlooker to witness a painful dressing in the wards than it is to be a spectator of the most impressive operation in the theatre. The patient in the ward is a human

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being—one shudders with him and suffers in his agonies—that white poor thing upon the table is a " case " ; once out of the theatre to revert to his humanity; and even as he is being wheeled to his ward his disabilities or sufferings of the future move the deepest sympathy, a sympathy none the less real because it is not often audibly expressed. But as he lies there and things are done to his inanimate body, the personal element scarcely enters in : only the admiration of that marvellous machine, the human frame, and the equal admiration of the skill of the artist who is manipulating his tools upon it for its future well-being.

The morning had well worn on before Jock showed any signs of returning consciousness. Nurse Vaughan was busy attending to the wants of other patients, when the little Taffy whom she had set in a chair beside Jock's bed to watch him called her.

" He's coming round now, nurse, I think."

The senior V.A.D. slipped a hand under the bed-clothes and felt the pulse, rather feeble and slow, for the strain had been greater than had been supposed.

" He's all right now, Taffy," she said

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reassuringly. "What a long sleep he's had. Wake up, Jock," tapping him gently on the cheek. "Come along: you're all right now."

Jock opened sleepy eyes and looked at her blankly; then he shut them again as if he were too tired to look any longer. Later on he began to sing softly in his own tongue, the burden of his song alleged by the ward to be the inevitable "wee drappie." But it was after the dinners had been brought up and disposed of that he first made any coherent speech.

Opening his eyes he looked round rather vacantly until he found the face he sought. The senior V.A.D. was not far from his bed and with one rather feeble hand he beckoned her to draw nearer. Now the senior V.A.D. had been nursing for more than three years and there was little in heaven or earth or man's philosophy that would surprise her. Expecting some tender confidence meant for her ear only—she had often been the third-hand recipient of fond affection—she bent over the bed.

"What is it, Jock—did you want to tell me something?"

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"Ay, I do that," was the whispered reply. "Dinna gae till Dundee—promise me that noo."

"No, of course I won't, Jock, if you don't want me to. I wouldn't dream of going."

"Ay, but come ye nearer." The voice was urgent.

Humouring him, the V.A.D. bent down till her ear was very near his face.

"There's a turrible lot o' bad women i' Dundee," he explained.

THE END

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